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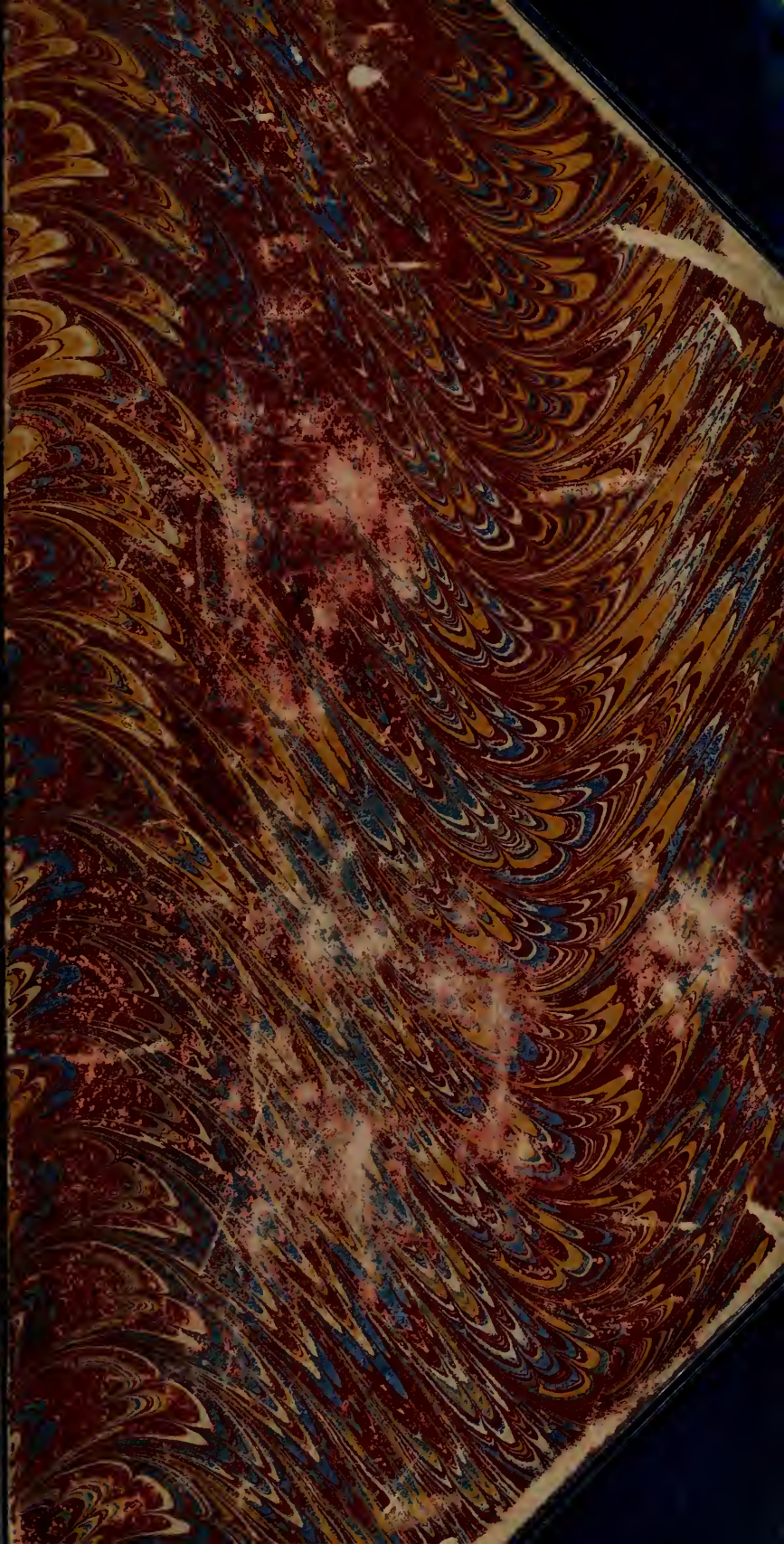

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WHAT'S MINE'S MINE

BY

GEORGE MAC DONALD

AUTHOR OF "ROBERT FALCONER," "DONAL GRANT," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

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1886

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WHAT'S MINE'S MINE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW COME THEY THERE?

The room was handsomely furnished, but such as I would quarrel with none for calling common, for it certainly was uninteresting. Not a thing in it had to do with genuine individual choice, but merely with the fashion and custom of the class to which its occupiers belonged. It was a dining-room, of good size, appointed with all the things a dining-room "ought" to have, mostly new, and entirely expensive—mirrored sideboard in oak; heavy chairs, just the dozen, in fawn-coloured morocco

seats and backs—the dining-room, in short, of a London-house inhabited by rich middle-class people. A big fire blazed in the low round-backed grate, whose flashes were reflected in the steel fender and the ugly fire-irons that were never used. A snowy cloth of linen, finer than ordinary, for there was pride in the housekeeping, covered the large dining-table, and a company, evidently a family, was eating its breakfast. But how come these people *there?*

For, supposing my reader one of the company, let him rise from the well-appointed table—its silver, bright as the complex motions of butler's elbows can make it; its china, ornate though not elegant; its ham, huge, and neither too fat nor too lean; its game-pie, with nothing to be desired in composition, or in flavour natural or artificial;—let him rise from these and go to the left of the two windows, for there are two opposite each other, the room having been enlarged

by being built out: if he be such a one as I would have for a reader, might I choose —a reader whose heart, not merely his eye, mirrors what he sees—one who not merely beholds the outward shows of things, but catches a glimpse of the soul that looks out of them, whose garment and revelation they are;—if he be such, I say, he will stand, for more than a moment, speechless with something akin to that which made the morning stars sing together.

He finds himself gazing far over western seas, while yet the sun is in the east. They lie clear and cold, pale and cold, broken with islands scattering thinner to the horizon, which is jagged here and there with yet another. The ocean looks a wild, yet peaceful mingling of lake and land. Some of the islands are green from shore to shore, of low yet broken surface; others are mere rocks, with a bold front to the sea, one or two of them strange both in form and character. Over the pale blue sea hangs the pale blue sky, flecked with a

few cold white clouds that look as if they disowned the earth they had got so high—though none the less her children, and doomed to descend again to her bosom. A keen little wind is out, crisping the surface of the sea in patches—a pretty large crisping to be seen from that height, for the window looks over hill above hill to the sea. Life, quiet yet eager, is all about; the solitude itself is alive, content to be a solitude because it is alive. Its life needs nothing from beyond—is independent even of the few sails of fishing boats that here and there with their red brown break the blue of the water.

If my reader, gently obedient to my thaumaturgy, will now turn and cross to the other window, let him as he does so beware of casting a glance on his right towards the place he has left at the table, for the room will now look to him tenfold commonplace, so that he too will be inclined to ask, "How come these and their belongings *here* —just *here?*"—let him first look from the

window. There he sees hills of heather rolling away eastward, at middle distance beginning to rise into mountains, and farther yet, on the horizon, showing snow on their crests—though that may disappear and return several times before settling down for the winter. It is a solemn and very still region—not a *pretty* country at all, but great—beautiful with the beauties of colour and variety of surface; while, far in the distance, where the mountains and the clouds have business together, its aspect rises to grandeur. To his first glance probably not a tree will be discoverable; the second will fall upon a solitary clump of firs, like a mole on the cheek of one of the hills not far off, a hill steeper than most of them, and green to the top.

Is my reader seized with that form of divine longing which wonders what lies over the nearest hill? Does he fancy, ascending the other side to its crest, some sweet face of highland girl, singing songs of the old centuries while yet there was

a people in these wastes? Why should he imagine in the presence of the actual? why dream when the eyes can see? He has but to return to the table to reseat himself by the side of one of the prettiest of girls!

She is fair, yet with a glowing tinge under her fairness which flames out only in her eyes, and seldom reddens her skin. She has brown hair with just a suspicion of red and no more, and a waviness that turns to curl at the ends. She has a good forehead, arched a little, not without a look of habitation, though whence that comes it might be hard to say. There are no great clouds on that sky of the face, but there is a soft dimness that might turn to rain. She has a straight nose, not too large for the imperfect yet decidedly Greek contour; a doubtful, rather straight, thin-lipped mouth, which seems to dissolve into a bewitching smile, and reveals perfect teeth—and a good deal more to the eyes that can read it. When the mouth smiles, the eyes light up, which is a good sign. Their shape is long

oval—and their colour when unlighted, much that of an unpeeled almond; when she smiles, they grow red. She has an object in life which can hardly be called a mission. She is rather tall, and quite graceful, though not altogether natural in her movements. Her dress gives a feathery impression to one who rather receives than notes the look of ladies. She has a good hand—not the doll hand so much admired of those who can judge only of quantity and know nothing of quality, but a fine sensible hand,—the best thing about her: a hand may be too small just as well as too large.

Poor mother earth! what a load of disappointing women, made fit for fine things, and running all to self and show, she carries on her weary old back! From all such, good Lord deliver us!—except it be for our discipline or their awaking.

Near her at the breakfast table sits one of aspect so different, that you could ill believe they belonged to the same family.

She is younger and taller—tall indeed, but not ungraceful, though by no means beautiful. She has all the features that belong to a face—among them not a good one. Stay! I am wrong: there were in truth, dominant over the rest, *two* good features—her two eyes, dark as eyes well could be without being all pupil, large, and rather long like her sister's until she looked at you, and then they opened wide. They did not flash or glow, but were full of the light that tries to see—questioning eyes. They were simple eyes—I will not say without *arrière pensée*, for there was no end of thinking faculty, if not yet thought, behind them,—but honest eyes that looked at you from the root of eyes, with neither attack nor defence in them. If she was not so graceful as her sister, she was hardly more than a girl, and had a remnant of that curiously lovely mingling of grace and clumsiness which we see in long-legged growing girls. I will give her the advantage of not being further described, except so far

as this—that her hair was long and black, that her complexion was dark, with something of a freckly unevenness, and that her hands were larger and yet better than her sister's.

There is one truth about a plain face, that may not have occurred to many: its ugliness accompanies a condition of larger undevelopment, for all ugliness that is not evil, is undevelopment; and so implies the larger material and possibility of development. The idea of no countenance is yet carried out, and this kind will take more developing for the completion of its idea, and may result in a greater beauty. I would therefore advise any young man of aspiration in the matter of beauty, to choose a plain woman for wife—*if through her plainness she is yet lovely in his eyes;* for the loveliness is herself, victorious over the plainness, and her face, so far from complete and yet serving her loveliness, has in it room for completion on a grander scale than possibly most handsome faces.

In a handsome face one sees the lines of its coming perfection, and has a glimpse of what it must be when finished: few are prophets enough for a plain face. A keen surprise of beauty waits many a man, if he be pure enough to come near the transfiguration of the homely face he loved.

This plain face was a solemn one, and the solemnity suited the plainness. It was not specially expressive — did not look specially intelligent; there was more of latent than operative power in it—while her sister's had more expression than power. Both were lady-like; whether they were ladies, my reader may determine. There are common ladies and there are rare ladies; the former *may* be countesses; the latter *may* be peasants.

There were two younger girls at the table, of whom I will say nothing more than that one of them looked awkward, promised to be handsome, and was apparently a good soul; the other was pretty, and looked pert.

The family possessed two young men, but

they were not here; one was a partner in the business from which his father had practically retired; the other was that day expected from Oxford.

The mother, a woman with many autumnal reminders of spring about her, sat at the head of the table, and regarded her queendom with a smile a little set, perhaps, but bright. She had the look of a woman on good terms with her motherhood, with society, with the universe—yet had scarce a shadow of assumption on her countenance. For if she felt as one who had a claim upon things to go pleasantly with her, had she not put in her claim, and had it acknowledged? Her smile was a sweet white-toothed smile, true if shallow, and a more than tolerably happy one—often irradiating *the Governor* opposite—for so was the head styled by the whole family from mother to chit.

He was the only one at the table on whose countenance a shadow—as of some end unattained—was visible. He had tried

to get into parliament, and had not succeeded; but I will not presume to say that was the source of the shadow. He did not look discontented, or even peevish; there was indeed a certain radiance of success about him—only above the cloudy horizon of his thick, dark eyebrows, seemed to hang a thundery atmosphere. His forehead was large, but his features rather small; he had, however, grown a trifle fat, which tended to make up. In his youth he must have been very nice-looking, probably too pretty to be handsome. In good health and when things went well, as they had mostly done with him, he was sweet-tempered; what he might be in other conditions was seldom conjectured. But was that a sleeping thunder-cloud, or only the shadow of his eyebrows?

He had a good opinion of himself—on what grounds I do not know; but he was rich, and I know no better ground; I doubt if there is any more certain soil for growing a good opinion of oneself. Certainly, the

more you try to raise one by doing what is right and worth doing, the less you succeed.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer had finished his breakfast, and sat for a while looking at nothing in particular, plunged in deep thought about nothing at all, while the girls went on with theirs. He was a little above the middle height, and looked not much older than his wife; his black hair had but begun to be touched with silver; he seemed a man without an atom of care more than humanity counts reasonable; his speech was not unlike that of an Englishman, for, although born in Glasgow, he had been to Oxford. He spoke respectfully to his wife, and with a pleasant playfulness to his daughters; his manner was nowise made to order, but natural enough; his grammar was as good as conversation requires; everything was respectable about him—and yet—he was one remove at least from a gentleman. Something hard to define was lacking to that idea of perfection.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer's grandfather had

begun to make the family fortune by developing a little secret still in a remote highland glen, which had acquired a reputation for its whisky, into a great superterrene distillery. Both he and his son made money by it, and it had "done well" for Mr. Peregrine also. With all three of them the making of money had been the great calling of life. They were diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving Mammon, and founding claim to consideration on the fact. Neither Jacob nor John Palmer's worst enemy had ever called him a hypocrite: neither had been suspected of thinking to serve Mammon and God. Both had gone regularly to church, but neither had taught in a Sunday school, or once gone to a week-day sermon. Peregrine had built a church and a school. He did not now take any active part in the distillery, but worked mainly in money itself.

Jacob, the son of a ship-chandler in Greenock, had never thought about gentleman or no gentleman; but his son John

had entertained the difference, and done his best to make a gentleman of Peregrine; and neither Peregrine nor any of his family ever doubted his father's success; and if he had not quite succeeded, I would have the blame laid on Peregrine and not on either father or grandfather. For a man to *grow* a gentleman, it is of great consequence that his grandfather should have been an honest man; but if a man *be* a gentleman, it matters little what his grandfather or grandmother either was. Nay—if a man be a gentleman, it is of the smallest consequence, except for its own sake, whether the world counts him one or not.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer rose from the table with a merry remark on the prolongation of the meal by his girls, and went towards the door.

"Are you going to shoot?" asked his wife.

"Not to-day. But I am going to look after my guns. I daresay they've got them all right, but there's nothing like seeing to a thing yourself!"

Mr. Palmer had this virtue, and this very gentlemanlike way—that he always gave his wife as full an answer as he would another lady. He was not given to marital brevity.

He was there for the grouse-shooting—not exactly, only "as it were." He did not care *very* much about the sport, and had he cared nothing, would have been there all the same. Other people, in what he counted his social position, shot grouse, and he liked to do what other people did, for then he felt all right: if ever he tried the gate of heaven, it would be because other people did. But the primary cause of his being so far in the north was the simple fact that he had had the chance of buying a property very cheap—a fine property of mist and cloud, heather and rock, mountain and moor, and with no such reputation for grouse as to enhance its price. "My estate" sounded well, and after a time of good preserving he would be able to let it well, he trusted. No

sooner was it bought than his wife and daughters were eager to visit it; and the man of business, perceiving it would cost him much less if they passed their autumns there instead of on the continent, proceeded at once to enlarge the house and make it comfortable. If they should never go a second time, it would, with its perfect appointments, make the shooting there more attractive!

They had arrived the day before. The journey had been fatiguing, for a great part of it was by road; but they were all in splendid health, and not too tired to get up at a reasonable hour the next day.

CHAPTER II.

A SHORT GLANCE OVER THE SHOULDER.

Mr. Peregrine was the first of the Palmer family to learn that there was a Palmer coat of arms. He learned it at college, and on this wise.

One day a fellow-student, who pleased himself with what he called philology, remarked that his father must have been a bit of a humorist to name him Peregrine:—"except indeed it be a family name!" he added.

"I never thought about it," said Peregrine. "I don't quite know what you mean."

The fact was he had no glimmer of what he meant.

"Nothing profound," returned the other. "Only don't you see *Peregrine* means pilgrim? It is the same as the Italian *pellegrino*, from the Latin, *peregrinus*, which means one that goes about the fields,—what in Scotland you call a *landlouper*."

"Well, but," returned Peregrine, hesitatingly, "I don't find myself much wiser. *Peregrine* means a pilgrim, you say, but what of that? All names mean something, I suppose! It don't matter much."

"What is your coat of arms?"

"I don't know."

"Why did your father call you Peregrine?"

"I don't know that either. I suppose because he liked the name."

"Why should he have liked it?" continued the other, who was given to the Socratic method.

"I know no more than the man in the moon."

"What does your surname mean?"

"Something to do with palms, I suppose."

"Doubtless."

"You see I don't go in for that kind of thing like you!"

"Any man who cares about the cut of his coat, might have a little curiosity about the cut of his name: it sits to him a good deal closer!"

"That is true—so close that you can't do anything with it. I can't pull mine off however you criticize it!"

"You can change it any day. Would you like to change it?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Stokes!" returned Peregrine dryly.

"I didn't mean with mine," growled the other. "My name is an historical one too—but that is not in question.—Do you know your crest ought to be a hairy worm?"

"Why?"

"Don't you know the palmer-worm? It got its name where you got yours!"

"Well, we all come from Adam!"

"What! worms and all?'

"Surely. We're all worms, the parson says. Come, put me through; it's time for lunch. Or, if you prefer, let me burst in ignorance. I don't mind."

"Well, then, I will explain. The palmer was a pilgrim: when he came home, he carried a palm-branch to show he had been to the holy land."

"Did the hairy worm go to the holy land too?"

"He is called a palmer-worm because he has feet enough to go any number of pilgrimages. But you are such a land-louper, you ought to blazon two hairy worms saltier-wise."

"I don't understand."

"Why, your name, interpreted to half an ear, is just *Pilgrim Pilgrim!*"

"I wonder if my father meant it!"

"That I cannot even guess at, not having the pleasure of knowing your father. But it does look like a paternal joke!"

His friend sought out for him the coat and crest of the Palmers; but for the latter,

strongly recommended a departure: the fresh family-branch would suit the worm so well!—his crest ought to be two worms crossed, tufted, the tufts ouched in gold. It was not heraldic language, but with Peregrine passed well enough. Still he did not take to the worms, but contented himself with the ordinary crest. He was henceforth, however, better pleased with his name, for he fancied in it something of the dignity of a doubled surname.

His first glance at his wife was because she crossed the field of his vision; his second glance was because of her beauty; his third because her name was *Shelley*. It is marvellous how whimsically sentimental commonplace people can be where their own interesting personality is concerned: her name he instantly associated with *scallop-shell*, and began to make inquiry about her. Learning that her other name was Miriam, one also of the holy land—

"A most remarkable coincidence! — a

mere coincidence of course!" he said to himself. "Evidently that is the woman destined to be the companion of my pilgrimage!"

When their first child was born, the father was greatly exercised as to a fitting name for him. He turned up an old botany book, and sought out the scientific names of different palms. *Chamaerops* would not do, for it was a *dwarf-palm; Borassus* might do, seeing it was a boy—only it stood for a *fan-palm; Corypha* would not be bad for a girl, only it was the name of a heathen goddess, and would not go well with the idea of a holy palmer. *Cocoa*, *Phœnix*, and *Areca*, one after the other, went in at his eyes and through his head; none of them pleased him. His wife, however, who in her smiling way had fallen in with his whim, helped him out of his difficulty. She was the daughter of nonconformist parents in Lancashire, and had been encouraged when a child to read a certain old-fashioned book called The Pilgrim's

Progress, which her husband had never seen. He did not read it now, but accepting her suggestion, named the boy *Christian*. When a daughter came, he would have had her Christiana, but his wife persuaded him to be content with Christina. They named their second son Valentine, after Mr. Valiant-for-truth. Their second daughter was Mercy; and for the third and fourth, Hope and Grace seemed near enough. So the family had a cool glow of puritanism about it, while nothing was farther from the thoughts of any of them than what their names signified. All, except the mother, associated them with the crusades for the rescue of the sepulchre of the Lord from the pagans; not a thought did one of them spend on the rescue of a live soul from the sepulchre of low desires, mean thoughts, and crawling selfishness.

CHAPTER III.

THE GIRLS' FIRST WALK.

THE *Governor*, Peregrine and Palmer as he was, did not care about walking at any time, not even when he *had* to do it because other people did; the mother, of whom there would have been little left had the sweetness in her moral, and the housekeeping in her practical nature, been subtracted, had things to see to within doors: the young people must go out by themselves! They put on their hats, and issued.

The temperature was keen, though it was now nearly the middle of August, by which time in those northern regions the earth has begun to get a little warm: the house stood high, and the atmosphere was thin. There

was a certain sense of sadness in the pale sky and its cold brightness; but these young people felt no cold, and perceived no sadness. The air was exhilarating, and they breathed deep breaths of a pleasure more akin to the spiritual than they were capable of knowing. For as they gazed around them, they thought, like Hamlet's mother in the presence of her invisible husband, that they saw all there was to be seen. They did not know nature: in the school to which they had gone they patronized instead of revering her. She wrought upon them nevertheless after her own fashion with her children, unheedful whether they knew what she was about or not. The mere space, the mere height from which they looked, the rarity of the air, the soft aspiration of earth towards heaven, made them all more of children.

But not one of them being capable of enjoying anything by herself, together they were unable to enjoy much; and, like the miser who, when he cannot much enjoy his

money, desires more, began to desire more company to share in the already withering satisfaction of their new possession—to help them, that is, to get pleasure out of it, as out of a new dress. It is a good thing to desire to share a good thing, but it is not well to be unable alone to enjoy a good thing. It is our enjoyment that should make us desirous to share. What is there to share if the thing be of no value in itself? To enjoy alone is to be able to share. No participation can make that of value which in itself is of none. It is not love alone but pride also, and often only pride, that leads to the desire for another to be present with us in possession.

The girls grew weary of the show around them because it was so quiet, so regardless of their presence, so moveless, so monotonous. Endless change was going on, but it was too slow for them to see; had it been rapid, its motions were not of a kind to interest them. Ere half an hour they had begun to think with regret of Piccadilly

and Regent street—for they had passed the season in London. There is a good deal counted social which is merely gregarious. Doubtless humanity is better company than a bare hill-side; but not a little depends on how near we come to the humanity, and how near we come to the hill. I doubt if one who could not enjoy a bare hill-side alone, would enjoy that hill-side in any company; if he thought he did, I suspect it would be that the company enabled him, not to forget himself in what he saw, but to be more pleasantly aware of himself than the lone hill would permit him to be;—for the mere hill has its relation to that true self which the common self is so anxious to avoid and forget. The girls, however, went on and on, led mainly by the animal delight of motion, the two younger making many a diversion up the hill on the one side, and down the hill on the other, shrieking at everything fresh that pleased them.

The house they had just left stood on the

projecting shoulder of a hill, here and there planted with firs. Of the hardy trees there was a thicket at the back of the house, while toward the south, less hardy ones grew in the shrubbery, though they would never, because of the sea-breezes, come to any height. The carriage-drive to the house joined two not very distant points on the same road, and there was no lodge at either gate. It was a rough, country road, a good deal rutted, and seldom repaired. Opposite the gates rose the steep slope of a heathery hill, along the flank of which the girls were now walking. On their right lay a piece of rough moorland, covered with heather, patches of bracken, and coarse grass. A few yards to the right, it sank in a steep descent. Such was the disposition of the ground for some distance along the road—on one side the hill, on the other a narrow level, and abrupt descent.

As they advanced they caught sight of a ruin rising above the brow of the descent: the two younger darted across the heather

toward it; the two elder continued their walk along the road, gradually descending towards a valley.

"I wonder what we shall see round the corner there!" said Mercy, the younger of the two.

"The same over again, I suppose!" answered Christina. "What a rough road it is! I've twice nearly sprained my ankle!"

"I was thinking of what I saw the other day in somebody's travels—about his interest in every turn of the road, always looking for what was to come next."

"Time enough when it comes, in my opinion!" rejoined Christina.

For she was like any other mirror—quite ready to receive what was thrown upon her, but incapable of originating anything, almost incapable of using anything.

As they descended, and the hill-side, here covered with bracken and boulders, grew higher and higher above them, the valley, in front and on the right, gradually opened,

here and there showing a glimpse of a small stream that cantered steadily toward the sea, now tumbling over a rock, now sullen in a brown pool. Arriving at length at a shoulder of the hill round which the road turned, a whole mile of the brook lay before them. It came down a narrow valley, with scraps of meadow in the bottom; but immediately below them the valley was of some width, and was good land from side to side, where green oats waved their feathery grace, and the yellow barley was nearly ready for the sickle. No more than the barren hill, however, had the fertile valley anything for them. Their talk was of the last ball they were at.

The sisters were about as good friends as such negative creatures could be; and they would be such friends all their lives, if on the one hand neither of them grew to anything better, and on the other no jealousy, or marked difference of social position through marriage, intervened. They loved each other, if not tenderly, yet with the

genuineness of healthy family-habit—a thing not to be despised, for it keeps the door open for something better. In itself it is not at all to be reckoned upon, for habit is but the merest shadow of reality. Still it is not a small thing, as families go, if sisters and brothers do not dislike each other.

They were criticizing certain of the young men they had met at the said ball. Being, in their development, if not in their nature, commonplace, what should they talk about but clothes or young men? And why, although an excellent type of its kind, should I take the trouble to record their conversation? To read, it might have amused me—or even interested, as may a carrot painted by a Dutchman; but were I a painter, I should be sorry to paint carrots, and the girls' talk is not for my pen. At the same time I confess myself incapable of doing it justice. When one is annoyed at the sight of things meant to be and not beautiful, there is danger of

not giving them even the poor fair-play they stand in so much the more need of that it can do so little for them.

But now they changed the subject of their talk. They had come to a point of the road not far from the ruin to which the children had run across the heather.

"Look, Chrissy! It *is* an old castle!" said Mercy. "I wonder whether it is on our land!"

"Not much to be proud of!" replied the other. "It is nothing but the walls of a square house!"

"Not just a common square house! Look at that pepper-pot on one of the corners!—I wonder how it is all the old castles get deserted!"

"Because they are old. It's well to desert them before they tumble down."

"But they wouldn't tumble down if they weren't neglected. Think of Warwick castle! Stone doesn't rot like wood! Just see the thickness of those walls!"

"Yes, they are thick! But stone too

has its way of rotting. Westminster palace is wearing through, flake by flake. The weather will be at the lords before long."

"That's what Valentine would call a sign of the times. I say, what a radical he is, Chrissy!—Look! the old place is just like an empty egg-shell! I know, if it had been mine, I wouldn't have let it come to that!"

"You say so because it never was yours: if it had been, you would know how uncomfortable it was!"

"I should like to know," said Mercy, after a little pause, during which they stood looking at the ruin, "whether the owners leave such places because they get fastidious and want better, or because they are too poor to keep them up! At all events a man must be poor to *sell* the house that belonged to his ancestors!—It must be miserable to grow poor after being used to plenty!—I wonder whose is the old place!"

"Oh, the governor's, I suppose! He has all hereabout for miles."

"I hope it is ours! I *should* like to build it up again! I would live in it myself!"

"I'm afraid the governor won't advance your share for that purpose!"

"I love old things!" said Mercy.

"I believe you take your old doll to bed with you yet!" rejoined Christina. "I am different to you!" she continued, with Frenchified grammar; "I like things as new as ever I can have them!"

"I like new things well enough, Chrissy —you know I do! It is natural. The earth herself has new clothes once a year. It is but once a year, I grant!"

"Often enough for an old granny like her!"

"Look what a pretty cottage!—down there, half-way to the burn! It's like an English cottage! Those we saw as we came along were either like a piece of the earth, or so white as to look ghastly! This one looks neat and comfortable, and has trees about it!"

The ruin, once a fortified house and called

a castle, stood on a sloping root or spur that ran from the hill down to the bank of the stream, where it stopped abruptly with a steep scaur, at whose foot lay a dark pool. On the same spur, half-way to the burn, stood a low, stone-built, thatched cottage, with a little grove about it, mostly of the hardy, contented, musical fir—a tree that would seem to have less regard to earthly prosperity than most, and looks like a pilgrim and a stranger: not caring much, it thrives where other trees cannot. There might have been a hundred of them, mingled, in strangest contrast, with a few delicate silver birches, about the cottage. It stood toward the east side of the sinking ridge, which had a steep descent, both east and west, to the fields below. The slopes were green with sweet grass, and apparently smooth as a lawn. Not far from where the cottage seemed to rest rather than rise or stand, the burn rushed right against the side of the spur, as if to go straight through it, but turned abruptly, and flowed along

the side to the end of it, where its way to the sea was open. On the point of the ridge were a few more firs: except these, those about the cottage, the mole on the hill-cheek, and the plantation about the New House, up or down was not a tree to be seen. The girls stood for a moment looking.

"It's really quite pretty!" said Christina with condescension. "It has actually something of what one misses here so much—a certain cosy look! Tidy it is too! As you say, Mercy, it might be in England —only for the poverty of its trees.—And oh those wretched bare hills!" she added, as she turned away and moved on.

"Wait till the heather is quite out: then you will have colour to make up for the bareness."

"Tell true now, Mercy: that you are Scotch need not keep you from speaking the truth:—don't you think heather just—well—just a leetle magentaish?—not a colour to be altogether admired?—just

a little vulgar, don't you know? The fashion has changed so much within the last few years!"

"No, I don't think so; and if I did I should be ashamed of it. I suppose poor old mother Earth ought to go to the pre-Raphaelites to be taught how to dress herself!"

Mercy spoke with some warmth, but Christina was not sufficiently interested to be cross. She made no answer.

They were now at the part of the road which crossed the descending spur as it left the hill-side. Here they stopped again, and looked down the rocky slope. There was hardly anything green betwixt them and the old ruin—little but stones on a mass of rock; but immediately beyond the ruin the green began: there it seemed as if a wave of the meadow had risen and overflowed the spur, leaving its turf behind it. Catching sight of Hope and Grace as they ran about the ruin, they went to join them, the one drawn by a vague interest in the *exuviæ*

of vanished life, the other by mere curiosity to see inside the care-worn, protesting walls. Through a gap that might once have been a door, they entered the heart of the sad unhoping thing dropt by the Past on its way to oblivion: nothing looks so unlike life as a dead body, nothing so unfit for human dwelling as a long-forsaken house.

Finding in one corner a broken stair, they clambered up to a gap in the east wall; and as they reached it, heard the sound of a horse's feet. Looking down the road, they saw a gig approaching with two men. It had reached a part not so steep, and was coming at a trot.

"Why!" exclaimed Christina, "there's Val!—and some one with him!"

"I heard the governor say to mamma," returned Mercy, "that Val was going to bring a college friend with him, —'for a pop at the grouse,' he said. I wonder what he will be like!"

"He's a good-big-looking fellow," said Christina.

They drew nearer.

"You might have said a big, good-looking fellow!" rejoined Mercy.

"He really is handsome!—Now mind, Mercy, I was the first to discover it!" said Christina.

"Indeed you were not!—At least I was the first to *say* it!" returned Mercy. "But you will take him all to yourself anyhow, and I am sure I don't care!"

Yet the girls were not vulgar—they were only common. They did and said vulgar things because they had not the sensitive vitality to shrink from them. They had not been well taught—that is roused to *live:* in the family was not a breath of aspiration. There was plenty of ambition, that is, aspiration turned hell-ward. They thought themselves as far from vulgar as any lady in any land, being in this vulgar —that they despised the people they called vulgar, yet thought much of themselves for not being vulgar. There was little in them the world would call vulgar; but the

world and its ways are vulgar; its breeding will not pass with the ushers of the high countries. The worst in that of these girls was a *fast*, disagreeable way of talking, which they owed to a certain governess they had had for a while.

They hastened to the road. The gig came up. Valentine threw the reins to his companion, jumped out, embraced his sisters, and seemed glad to see them. Had he met them after a like interval at home, he would have given them a cooler greeting; but he had travelled so many miles that they seemed not to have met for quite a long time.

"My friend, Mr. Sercombe," he said, jerking his head toward the gig.

Mr. Sercombe raised his *pot-lid*—the last fashion in head-gear—and acquaintance was made.

"We'll drive on, Sercombe," said Valentine, jumping up. "You see, Chris, we're half dead with hunger! Do you think we shall find anything to eat?"

"Judging by what we left at breakfast," replied Christina, "I should say you will find enough for—one of you; but you had better go and see."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHOP IN THE VILLAGE.

Two or three days have passed. The sun had been set for an hour, and the night is already rather dark notwithstanding the long twilight of these northern regions, for a blanket of vapour has gathered over the heaven, and a few stray drops have begun to fall from it. A thin wind now and then wakes, and gives a feeble puff, but seems immediately to change its mind and resolve not to blow, but let the rain come down. A drearier-looking spot for human abode it would be difficult to imagine, except it were as much of the sandy Sahara, or of the ashy, sage-covered waste of western America. A muddy road wound through huts of turf

—among them one or two of clay, and one or two of stone, which were more like cottages. Hardly one had a window two feet square, and many of their windows had no glass. In almost all of them the only chimney was little more than a hole in the middle of the thatch. This rendered the absence of glass in the windows not so objectionable; for, left without ordered path to its outlet, the smoke preferred a circuitous route, and lingered by the way, filling the air. Peat-smoke, however, is both wholesome and pleasant, nor was there mingled with it any disagreeable smell of cooking. Outside were no lamps; the road was unlighted save by the few rays that here and there crept from a window, casting a doubtful glimmer on the mire.

One of the better cottages sent out a little better light, though only from a tallow candle, through the open upper half of a door horizontally divided in two. Except by that same half-door, indeed, little light could enter the place, for its one window

was filled with all sorts of little things for sale. Small and inconvenient for the humblest commerce, this was not merely the best, it was the only shop in the hamlet.

There were two persons in it, one before and one behind the counter. The latter was a young woman, the former a man.

He was leaning over the counter—whether from weariness, listlessness, or interest in his talk with the girl behind, it would not have been easy, in the dim light and deep shadow, to say. He seemed quite at home, yet the young woman treated him with a marked, though unembarrassed respect. The candle stood to one side of them upon the counter, making a ghastly halo in the damp air; and in the light puff that occasionally came in at the door, casting the shadow of one of a pair of scales, now on this now on that of the two faces. The young woman was tall and dark, with a large forehead:—so much could be seen; but the sweetness of her mouth, the blue-

ness of her eyes, the extreme darkness of her hair, were not to be distinguished. The man also was dark. His coat was of some rough brown material, probably dyed and woven in the village, and his kilt of tartan. They were more than well worn—looked even in that poor light a little shabby. On his head was the highland bonnet called a glengarry. His profile was remarkable—hardly less than grand, with a certain aquiline expression, although the nose was not roman. His eyes appeared very dark, but in the daylight were greenish hazel. Usually he talked with the girl in Gaelic, but was now speaking English, a far purer English than that of most English people, though with something of the character of book-English as distinguished from conversation-English, and a very perceptible accent.

"And when was it you heard from Lachlan, Annie?" he asked.

After a moment's pause, during which she had been putting away things in a

drawer of the counter—not so big as many a kitchen dresser—

"Last Thursday it was, sir," answered the girl. "You know we hear every month, sometimes oftener."

"Yes; I know that.—I hope the dear fellow is well?"

"He is quite well and of good hope. He says he will soon come and see us now."

"And take you away, Annie?"

"Well, sir," returned Annie, after a moment's hesitation, "he does not *say* so!"

"If he did not mean it, he would be a rascal, and I should have to kill him. But my life on Lachlan's honesty!"

"Thank you, sir. He would lay down his for you."

"Not if you said to him, *Don't!*—eh, Annie?"

"But he would, Macruadh!" returned the young woman, almost angrily. "Are not you his chief?"

"Ah, that is all over now, my girl! There are no chiefs, and no clans any more!

The chiefs that need not, yet sell their land like Esau for a mess of pottage—and their brothers with it! And the Sasunnach who buys it, claims rights over them that never grew on the land or were hid in its caves! Thank God, the poor man is not their slave, but he is the worse off, for they will not let him eat, and he has nowhere to go. My heart is like to break for my people. Sometimes I feel as if I would gladly die."

"Oh, sir! don't say that!" expostulated the young woman, and her voice trembled. "Every heart in Glenruadh is glad when it goes well with the Macruadh."

"Yes, yes; I know you all love my father's son and my uncle's nephew; but how can it go well with the Macruadh when it goes ill with his clan? There is no way now for a chief to be the father of his people; we are all poor together! My uncle—God rest his soul!—they managed it so, I suppose, as to persuade him there was no help for it! Well, a man must be an honest man, even if there be no way but

ruin! God knows, as we've all heard my father say a hundred times from the pulpit, there's no ruin but dishonesty! For poverty and hard work, he's a poor creature would crouch for those!"

"He who well goes down hill, holds his head up!" said Annie, and a pause followed.

"There are strangers at the New House, we hear," she said.

"From a distance I saw some young ladies, and one or two men. I don't desire to see more of them. God forbid I should wish them any manner of harm! but—I hardly understand myself—I don't like to see them there. I am afraid it is pride. They are rich, I hear, so we shall not be troubled with attention from them; they will look down upon us."

"Look down on the Macruadh!" exclaimed Annie, as if she could not believe her ears.

"Not that I should heed that!" he went on. "A cock on the barn-ridge looks down on you, and you don't feel offended!

What I do dread is looking down on them. There is something in me that can hate, Annie, and I fear it. There is something about the land—I don't care about money, but I feel like a miser about the land!—I don't mean *any* land; I shouldn't care to buy land unless it had once been ours; but what came down to me from my own people—with my own people upon it—I would rather turn the spigot of the molten gold and let it run down the abyss, than a rood of that slip from me! I feel it even a disgrace to have lost what of it I never had!"

"Indeed, Macruadh," said Annie, "it's a hard time! There is no money in the country! And fast the people are going after Lachlan!"

"I shall miss you, Annie!"

"You are very kind to us all, sir."

"Are you not all my own! And you I have to take care of for Lachlan's sake besides. He left you solemnly to my charge—as if that had been necessary, the foolish fellow, when we are foster-brothers!"

Again came a pause.

"Not a gentleman-farmer left from one end of the strath to the other!" said the chief at length. "When Ian is at home, we feel just like two old turkey-cocks left alone in the yard!"

"Say two golden eagles, sir, on the cliff of the rock."

"Don't compare us to the eagle, Annie. I do not love the bird. He is very proud and greedy and cruel, and never will know the hand that tames him. He is the bird of the monarch or the earl, not the bird of the father of his people. But he is beautiful, and I do not kill him."

"They shot another, the female bird, last week! All the birds are going! Soon there will be nothing but the great sheep and the little grouse. The capercailzie's gone, and the ptarmigan's gone!—Well, there's a world beyond!"

"Where the birds go, Annie?—Well, it may be! But the ptarmigan's not gone yet, though there are not many; and for the

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capercailzie—only who that loves them will be here to see!—But do you really think there is a heaven for all God's creatures, Annie? Ian does."

"I don't know what I said to make you think so, sir! When the heart aches the tongue mistakes. But how is my lady, your mother?"

"Pretty well, thank you—wonderfully cheerful. It is time I went home to her. Lachlan would think I was playing him false, and making love to you on my own account!"

"No fear! He would know better than that! He would know too, if she was not belonging to Lachlan, her father's daughter would not let her chief humble himself."

"You're one of the old sort, Annie! Good night. Mind you tell Lachlan I never miss a chance of looking in to see how you are getting on."

"I will. Good night, Macruadh."

They shook hands over the counter, and the young chief took his departure.

As he stood up, he showed a fine-made, powerful frame, over six feet in height, and perfectly poised. With a great easy stride he swept silently out of the shop; nor from gait any more than look would one have thought he had been all day at work on the remnant of property he could call his own.

To a cit it would have seemed strange that one sprung from innumerable patriarchal ancestors holding the land of the country, should talk so familiarly with a girl in a miserable little shop in a most miserable hamlet; it would have seemed stranger yet that such a one should toil at the labour the soul of a cit despises; but stranger than both it would seem to him, if he saw how such a man is tempted to look down upon *him*.

If less *cleverness* is required for country affairs, they leave the more room for thinking. There are great and small in every class; here and there is a ploughman that understands Burns, here and there a large-

minded shopkeeper, here and there perhaps an unselfish duke. Doubtless most of the youth's ancestors would likewise have held such labour unworthy of a gentleman, and would have preferred driving to their hills a herd of lowland cattle; but this, the last Macruadh, had now and then a peep into the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHIEF.

The Macruadh strode into the dark, and down the village, wasting no time in picking his way—thence into the yet deeper dark of the moorland hills. The rain was beginning to come down in earnest, but he did not heed it; he was thoroughbred, and feared no element. An umbrella was to him a ludicrous thing: how could a little rain—as he would have called it had it come down in torrents—hurt any one!

The Macruadh, as the few who yet held by the sore-frayed, fast-vanishing skirt of clanship, called him, was the son of the last minister of the parish—a godly man, who lived that which he could ill explain, and

was immeasurably better than those parts of his creed which, from a sense of duty, he pushed to the front. For he held devoutly by the root of which he spoke too little, and it supplied much sap to his life and teaching —out of the pulpit. He was a genial, friendly, and by nature even merry man, always ready to share what he had, and making no show of having what he had not, either in wisdom, knowledge, or earthly goods. His father and brother had been owners of the property and chiefs of the clan, much beloved by the poor of it, and not a little misunderstood by most of the more flourishing. For a great hunger after larger means, the ambition of the mammon-ruled world, had arisen in the land, and with it a rage for emigration. The uncle of the present Macruadh did all he could to keep his people at home, lived on a couple of hundreds a year himself, and let many of his farms to his gentlemen-tacksmen, as they were called, at lower rents; but it was unavailing; one after another departed,

until his land lay in a measure waste, and he grew very poor, mourning far more over his clan and his country than his poverty. In more prosperous times he had scraped together a little money, meaning it, if he could but avoid spending it in his old age, for his brother, who must soon succeed him; for he was himself a bachelor—the result of a romantic attachment and sorrow in his youth; but he lent it to a company which failed, and so lost it. At length he believed himself compelled, for the good of his people, to part with all but a mere remnant of the property. From the man to whom he sold it, Mr. Peregrine Palmer bought it for twice the money, and had still a good bargain. But the hopes of the laird were disappointed: in the sheep it fed, and the grouse it might be brought to breed, lay all its value in the market; there was no increase in the demand for labour; and more and more of the peasantry emigrated, or were driven to other parts of the country. Such was the present treatment of the land,

causing human life to ebb from it, and working directly counter to the creative God.

The laird retired to the humble cottage of his brother the pastor, just married rather late in life—where every comfort love could give waited for him; but the thought that he could have done better for his people by retaining the land soon wore him out; and having made a certain disposition of the purchase-money, he died.

What remained of the property came to the minister. As for the chieftainship, that had almost died before the chief; but, reviving by union with the reverence felt for the minister, it took thereafter a higher form. When the minister died, the idea of it transmitted to his son was of a peculiarly sacred character; while in the eyes of the people, the authority of the chief and the influence of the minister seemed to meet reborn in Alister notwithstanding his youth. In himself he was much beloved, and in

love the blessed rule, blessed where understood, holds, that to him that hath shall be given, he only who has being fit to receive. The love the people bore to his father, both pastor and chief, crowned head and heart of Alister. Scarce man or woman of the poor remnant of the clan did not love the young Macruadh.

On his side was true response. With a renewed and renovating conscience, and a vivid sense that all things had to be made new, he possessed an old strong heart, clinging first to his father and mother, and then to the shadow even of any good thing that had come floating down the ages. Call it a dream, a wild ideal, a foolish fancy —call it what you please, he was filled with the notion of doing something in his own person and family, having the remnant of the clan for the nucleus of his endeavour, to restore to a vital reality, let it be of smallest extent, that most ancient of governments, the patriarchal, which, all around, had rotted into the feudal, in its turn rapidly

disintegrating into the mere dust and ashes of the kingdom of the dead, over which Mammon reigns supreme. There may have been youthful presumption and some folly in the notion, but it sprang neither from presumption nor folly, but from simple humanity, and his sense of the responsibility he neither could nor would avoid, as the person upon whom had devolved the headship, however shadowy, of a house, ruinous indeed, but not yet razed.

The castle on the ridge stood the symbol of the family condition. It had, however, been a ruin much longer than any one alive could remember. Alister's uncle had lived in a house on the spot where Mr. Peregrine Palmer's now stood; the man who bought it had pulled it down to build that which Mr. Palmer had since enlarged. It was but a humble affair—a great cottage in stone, much in the style of that in which the young chief now lived—only six times the size, with the one feature indispensable to the notion of a chief's residence, a large

hall. Some would say it was but a huge kitchen; but it was the sacred place of the house, in which served the angel of hospitality. *There* was always plenty to eat and drink for any comer, whether he had "claim" or not: the question of claim where was need, was not thought of. When the old house had to make room for the new, the staves of the last of its half-pipes of claret, one of which used always to stand on tap amidst the peat-smoke, yielded its final ministration to humanity by serving to cook a few meals for mason and carpenter.

The property of Clanruadh, for it was regarded as clan-property *because* belonging to the chief, stretched in old time away out of sight in all directions—nobody, in several, could tell exactly how far, for the undrawn boundary lines lay in regions of mist and cloud, in regions stony, rocky, desert, to which a red deer, not to say a stray sheep, rarely ascended. At one time it took in a portion at least of every hill

to be seen from the spot where stood the ruin. The chief had now but a small farm, consisting of some fair soil on the slope of a hill, and some very good in the valley on both sides of the burn; with a hill-pasture that was not worth measuring in acres, for it abounded in rocks, and was prolific in heather and ling, with patches of coarse grass here and there, and some extent of good high-valley grass, to which the small black cattle and black-faced sheep were driven in summer. Beyond periodical burnings of the heather, this uplifted portion received no attention save from the mist, the snow, the rain, the sun, and the sweet air. A few grouse and black game bred on it, and many mountain-hares, with martens, wild cats, and other *vermin*. But so tender of life was the Macruadh that, though he did not spare these last, he did not like killing even a fox or a hooded crow, and never shot a bird for sport, or would let another shoot one, though the poorest would now and then beg a bird or two from him, sure of having

their request. It seemed to him as if the creatures were almost a part of his clan, of which also he had to take care against a greedy world. But as the deer and the birds ranged where they would, it was not much he could do for them—as little almost as for the men and women that had gone over the sea, and were lost to their country in Canada.

Regret, and not any murmur, stirred the mind of Alister Macruadh when he thought of the change that had passed on all things around him. He had been too well taught for grumbling—least of all at what was plainly the will of the Supreme—inasmuch as, however man might be to blame, the thing was there. Personal regrets he had none beyond those of family feeling and transmitted *sentiment*. He was able to understand something of the signs of the times, and saw that nothing could bring back the old way—saw that nothing comes back—at least in the same form ; saw that there had been much that ought not to

come back, and that, if patriarchal ways were ever to return, they must rise out of, and be administered upon loftier principles —must begin afresh, and be wrought out afresh from the bosom of a new Abraham, capable of so bringing up his children that a new development of the one natural system of government should be possible with and through them. Perhaps even now, in the new country to which so many of his people were gone, some shadowy re-appearance of the old fashion might have begun to take shape on a higher level, with loftier aims, and in circumstances holding out fewer temptations to the evils of the past!

Alister could not, at his years, have generated such thoughts but for the wisdom that had gone before him—first the large-minded speculation of his father, who was capable even of discarding his prejudices where he saw they might mislead him; and next, the response of his mother to the same: she was the only one who entirely

understood her husband. Isobel Macruadh was a woman of real thinking-power. Her sons being but boys when their father died, she at once took the part of mediator between the mind of the father and that of his sons; and besides guiding them on the same principles, often told them things their father had said, and talked with them of things they had heard him say.

One of the chief lessons he left them wrought well for the casting out of all with which the feudal system had debased the patriarchal; and the poverty shared with the clan had powerfully helped: it was spoken against the growing talionic regard of human relations—that, namely, the conditions of a bargain fulfilled on both sides, all is fulfilled between the bargaining parties.

"In the possibility of any bargain," he had said, "are involved eternal conditions: there is relationship—there is brotherhood. Even to give with a denial of claim, to be kind under protest, is an injury, is charity without the love, is salt without the saltness.

If we spent our lives in charity we should never overtake neglected claims—claims neglected from the very beginning of the relations of men. If a man say, 'I have not been unjust; I owed the man nothing;' he sides with Death—says with the typical murderer, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' builds the tombs of those his fathers slew."

In the bosom of young Alister Macruadh, the fatherly relation of the strong to the weak survived the disappearance of most of the outward signs of clan-kindred: the chieftainship was *sublimed* in him. The more the body of outer fact died, the stronger grew in him the spirit of the relation. As some savage element of a race will reappear in an individual of it after ages of civilization, so may good old ways of thinking and feeling, modes long gone out of fashion and practice, survive and revive modified by circumstance, in an individual of a new age. Such a one will see the customs of his ancestors glorified in the mists of the past; what is noble in them will appeal to

all that is best in his nature, spurring the most generous of his impulses, and stirring up the conscience that would be void of offence. When the operative force of such regards has been fostered by the teaching of a revered parent; when the influences he has left behind are nourished and tended, with thorough belief and devoted care, by her who shared his authority in life, and now bears alone the family sceptre, there can be no bound set to their possible potency in a mind of high spiritual order. The primary impulse became with Alister a large portion of his religion: he was the shepherd of the much ravaged and dwindled Macruadh-fold; it was his church, in which the love of the neighbour was intensified in the love of the relation and dependent. To aid and guard this his flock, was Alister's divine service. It was associated with a great dislike of dogma, originating in the recoil of the truth within him from much that was commonly held and taught for true.

Call the thing enthusiasm or what you will, so you believe it there, and genuine.

It was only towards the poor of a decayed clan he had opportunity of exercising the cherished relation; almost all who were not poor had emigrated before the lands were sold; and indeed it was only the poor who set store by their unity with the old head. Not a few of the clan, removed elsewhither, would have smiled degenerate, and with scorn in their amusement, at the idea of Alister's clinging to any supposed reality in the position he could claim. Among such nevertheless were several who, having made money by trade, would each have been glad enough to keep up old traditions, and been ready even to revive older, had the headship fallen to him. But in the hands of a man whom, from the top of their wealth, they regarded as but a poor farmer, they forgot all about it—along with a few other more important and older-world matters; for where Mammon gets in his foot, he will soon be lord

of the house, and turn not merely Rank, his rival demon, out of doors, but God himself. Alister indeed lived in a dream; he did not know how far the sea of hearts had ebbed, leaving him alone on the mount of his vision; but he dreamed a dream that was worth dreaming; comfort and help flowed from it to those about him, nor did it fail to yield his own soul refreshment also. All dreams are not false; some dreams are truer than the plainest facts. Fact at best is but a garment of truth, which has ten thousand changes of raiment woven in the same loom. Let the dreamer only do the truth of his dream, and one day he will realize all that was worth realizing in it—and a great deal more and better than it contained. Alister had no far-reaching visions of anything to come out of his; he had, like the true man he was, only the desire to live up to his idea of what the people looked up to in him. The one thing that troubled him was, that his uncle, whom he loved so dearly, should have sold the land.

Doubtless there was pride mingled with his devotion, and pride is an evil thing. Still it was a human and not a devilish pride. I would not be misunderstood as defending pride, or even excusing it in any shape; it is a thing that must be got rid of at all costs; but even for evil we must speak the truth; and the pride of a good man, evil as it is, and in him more evil than in an evil man, yet cannot be in itself such a bad thing as the pride of a bad man. The good man would at once recognize and reject the pride of a bad man. A pride that loves cannot be so bad as a pride that hates. Yet if the good man do not cast out his pride, it will sink him lower than the bad man's, for it will degenerate into a worse pride than that of any bad man. Each must bring its own divinely-ordained consequence.

There is one other point in the character of the Macruadh which I must mention ere I pass on; in this region, and at this time, it was a great peculiarity, one that yielded

satisfaction to few of the clan, and made him even despised in the strath: he hated whisky, and all the drinking customs associated with it. In this he was not original; he had not come to hate it from noting the degradation and crime that attended it, or that as poverty grew, drunkenness grew, men who had used it in moderation taking more and more as circumstances became more adverse, turning sadness into slavery: he had been brought up to hate it. His father, who, as a clergyman doing his endeavour for the welfare of his flock, found himself greatly thwarted by its deadening influences, rendering men callous not only to the special vice itself, but to worse vices as well, had banished it from his table and his house; while the mother had from their very childhood instilled a loathing of the national weakness and its physical means into the minds of her sons. In her childhood she had seen its evils in her own father: by no means a drunkard, he was the less of a father because he did

as others did. Never an evening passed without his drinking his stated portion of whisky-toddy, growing more and more subject to attacks of bad temper, with consequent injustice and unkindness. The recollection may have made her too sweeping in her condemnation of the habit, but I doubt it; and anyhow a habit is not a man, and we need not much condemn that kind of injustice. We need not be tender over a habit which, though not all bad, yet leads to endless results that are all bad. I would follow such to its grave without many tears!

Isobel Macruadh was one of those rare women who preserve in years the influence gained in youth; and the thing that lay at the root of the fact was her justice. For though her highland temper would occasionally burst out in hot flame, everyone knew that if she were in the wrong, she would see it and say it before any one else would tell her of it. This justice it was, ready against herself as for another, that

fixed the influence which her goodness and her teaching of righteousness gained.

Her eldest child, a girl, died in infancy. Alister and Ian were her whole earthly family, and they worshipped her.

CHAPTER VI.

WORK AND WAGE.

ALISTER strode through the night, revolving no questions hard to solve, though such were not strangers to him. He had not been to a university like his brother, but he had had a good educational beginning—who ever had more than a beginning?—chiefly from his father, who for his time and opportunity was even a learned man—and better, a man who knew what things were worth a man's human while, and what were not: he could and did think about things that a man must think about or perish; and his son Alister had made himself able to think about what he did not know, by doing the thing he did know. But now, as

he walked, fighting with the wind, his bonnet of little shelter pulled down on his forehead, he was thinking mostly of Lachlan his foster-brother, whose devotion had done much to nourish in him the sense that he was head of the clan. He had not far to go to reach his home—about a couple of miles.

He had left the village a quarter of the way behind him, when through the darkness he spied something darker yet by the road-side. Going up to it, he found an old woman, half sitting, half standing, with a load of peats in a creel upon her back, unable, apparently, for the moment at least, to proceed. Alister knew at once by her shape and posture who she was.

"Ah, mistress Conal!" he said, "I am sorry to see you resting on such a night so near your own door. It means you have filled your creel too full, and tired yourself too much."

"I am not too much tired, Macruadh!" returned the old woman, who was proud

and cross-tempered, and had a reputation for witchcraft, which did her neither much good nor much harm.

"Well, whether you are tired or not, I believe I am the stronger of the two!"

"Small doubt of that, Alister!" said mistress Conal with a sigh.

"Then I will take your creel, and you will soon be home. Come along! It is going to be a wild night!"

So saying he took the rope from the neck of the old woman right gently, and threw the creel with a strong swing over his shoulder. This dislodged a few of the topmost of the peats which the poor old thing had been a long way to fetch. She heard them fall, and one of them struck her foot. She started up, almost in a rage.

"Sir! sir! my peats!" she cried. "What would you be throwing away the good peats into the dark for, letting that swallow them they should swallow!"

These words, as all that passed between them, were spoken neither in Scotch nor

English, but in Gaelic—which, were I able to write it down, most of my readers would no more understand than they would Phœnician : we must therefore content ourselves with what their conversation comes to in English, which, if deficient compared with Gaelic in vowel-sounds, yet serves to say most things capable of being said.

"I am sorry, mistress Conal; but we'll not be losing them," returned the laird gently, and began to feel about the road for the fallen peats.

"How many were there, do you think, of them that fell?" he asked, rising after a vain search.

"How should I be knowing! But I am sure there would be nigh six of them!" answered the woman, in a tone of deep annoyance—nor was it much wonder; they were precious to the cold, feeble age that had gone so far to fetch so few.

The laird again stooped his long back, and searched and searched, feeling on all sides around him. He picked up three.

Not another, after searching for several minutes, could he find.

"I'm thinking that must be all of them, but I find only three!" he said. "Come, let us go home! You must not make your cough worse for one or two peats, perhaps none!"

"Three, Macruadh, three!" insisted the old woman in wavering voice, broken by coughing; for, having once guessed six, she was not inclined to lower her idea of her having.

"Well, well! we'll count them when we get home!" said Alister, and gave his hand to her to help her up.

She yielded grumbling, and, bowed still though relieved from her burden, tottered by his side along the dark, muddy, wind-and-rain-haunted road.

"Did you see my niece to-night at the shop?" she asked; for she was proud of being so nearly related to those who kept the shop of the hamlet.

"That I did," answered the chief; and

a little talk followed about Lachlan in Canada.

No one could have perceived from the way in which the old woman accepted his service, and the tone in which she spoke to him while he bent under her burden, that she no less than loved her chief; but everybody only smiled at mistress Conal's rough speech. That night, ere she went to bed, she prayed for the Macruadh as she never prayed for one of her immediate family. And if there was a good deal of superstition mingled with her prayer, the main thing in it was genuine, that is, the love that prompted it; and if God heard only perfect prayers, how could he be the prayer-hearing God?

Her dwelling stood but a stone's-throw from the road, and presently they turned up to it by a short steep ascent. It was a poor hut, mostly built of turf; but turf makes warm walls, impervious to the wind, and it was a place of her own!—that is, she had it to herself, a luxury many cannot even

imagine, while to others to be able to be alone at will seems one of the original necessities of life. Even the Lord, who probably had not always a room to himself in the poor houses he staid at, could not do without solitude ; therefore not unfrequently spent the night in the open air, on the quiet, star-served hill : there even for him it would seem to have been easier to find an entrance into that deeper solitude which, it is true, he did not need in order to find his Father and his God, but which apparently he did need in order to come into closest contact with him who was the one joy of his life, whether his hard life on earth, or his blessed life in heaven.

The Macruadh set down the creel, and taking out peat after peat, piled them up against the wall, where already a good many waited their turn to be laid on the fire ; for, as the old woman said, she must carry a few when she could, and get ahead with her store ere the winter came, or she would soon be devoured : there was a death

that always prowled about old people, she said, watching for the fire to go out. Many of the Celts are by nature poets, and mistress Conal often spoke in a manner seldom heard from the lips of a lowland woman. The common forms of Gaelic are more poetic than those of most languages, and could have originated only with a poetic people, while mistress Conal was by no means an ordinary type of her people; maugre her ill temper and gruffness, she thought as well as spoke like a poetess. This, conjoined with the gift of the second sight, had helped to her reputation as a witch.

As the chief piled the peats, he counted them. She sat watching him and them from a stone that made part of a rude rampart to the hearth.

"I told you so, Macruadh!" she said, the moment she saw his hand return empty from the bottom of the creel. "I was positive there should be three more!—But what's on the road is not with the devil."

"I am very sorry!" said the chief, who thought it wiser not to contradict her.

He would have searched his sporan for a coin to make up to her for the supposed loss of her peats; but he knew well enough there was not a coin in it. He shook hands with her, bade her good night, and went, closing the door carefully behind him against a great gust of wind that struggled to enter, threatening to sweep the fire she was now blowing at with her wrinkled, leather-like lips, off the hearth altogether—a thing that had happened before, to the danger of the whole building, itself of the substance burning in the middle of its floor.

The Macruadh ran down the last few steep steps of the path, and jumped into the road. Through the darkness came the sound of one springing aside with a great start, and the click of a gun-lock.

"Who goes there?" cried a rather tremulous voice.

"The Macruadh," answered the chief.

The utterance apparently conveyed nothing.

"Do you belong to these parts?" said the voice.

A former Macruadh might have answered, "No; these parts belong to me;" Alister curtly replied,

"I do."

"Here then, my good fellow! take my game-bag, and carry it as far as the New House—if you know where I mean. I will give you a shilling."

One moment the chief spent in repressing a foolish indignation; the next he spent in reflection.

Had he seen how pale and tired was the youth with the gun, he would have offered to carry his bag for him; to offer and to be asked, however, most people find different; and here the offer of payment added to the difficulty. But the word *shilling* had raised the vision of the old woman in her lonely cottage, brooding over the loss, real or imaginary mattered nothing, of her three

far-borne peats. What a happy night, through all the wind and the rain, would a silver shilling under her chaff pillow give her! The thought froze the chief's pride, and warmed his heart. What right had he to deny her such a pleasure! It would cost him nothing! It would even bring him a little amusement! The chief of Clanruadh carrying his game-bag for a Sasunnach fellow to earn a shilling!—the idea had a touch of humorous consolation in it. I will not assert the consolation strong enough to cast quite out a certain feeling of shame that mingled with his amusement—a shame which—is it not odd!—he would not have felt had his sporan been full of sovereigns. But the shame was not altogether a shameful one; a fanciful fear of degrading the chieftainship, and a vague sense of the thing being an imposition, had each a part in it. There could be nothing dishonest, however, in thus earning a shilling for poor mistress Conal!

"I will carry your bag," he said, "but

I must have the shilling first, if you please."

"Oh!" rejoined Valentine Palmer. "You do not trust me! How then am I to trust you?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Alister—and, again finding himself on the point of being foolish, laughed.

"I will pay you when the job is done," said Valentine.

"That is quite fair, but it does not suit my purpose," returned Alister.

They were walking along the road side by side, but each could scarcely see anything of the other. The sportsman was searching his pockets to find a shilling. He succeeded, and, groping, put it in Alister's hand, with the words—

"All right! it is only a shilling! There it is! But it is not yours yet: here is the bag!"

Alister took the bag, turned, and ran back.

"Hillo!" cried Valentine.

But Alister had disappeared, and as soon as he turned up the soft path to the cottage, his steps became inaudible through the wind.

He opened the door, went in, laid the shilling on the back of the old woman's hand, and without a word hurried out again, and down to the road. The stranger was some distance ahead, tramping wearily on through the darkness, and grumbling at his folly in bribing a fellow with a shilling to carry off his game-bag. Alister overtook him.

"Oh, here you are after all!" exclaimed Valentine. "I thought you had made off with work and wages both! What did you do it for?"

"I wanted to give the shilling to an old woman close by."

"Your mother—eh?"

"No."

"Your grandmother?"

"No."

"*Some* relation then!" insisted the stranger.

"Doubtless," answered the laird, and Valentine thought him a surly fellow.

They walked on in silence. The youth could hardly keep up with Alister, who thought him ill bred, and did not care for his company.

"Why do you walk so fast?" said Valentine.

"Because I want to get home," replied Alister.

"But I paid you to keep me company!"

"You paid me to carry your bag. I will leave it at the New House."

His coolness roused the weary youth.

"You rascal!" he said; "you keep alongside of me, or I'll pepper you."

As he spoke, he shifted his gun. But Alister had already, with a few long strides, put a space of utter darkness between them. He had taken the shilling, and must carry the bag, but did not feel bound to personal attendance. At the same time he could not deny there was reason in the man's unwillingness to trust him. What had he

about him to give him in pledge? Nothing but his watch, his father's, a gift of *the Prince* to the head of the family!—he could not profane that by depositing it for a game-bag! He must yield to his employer, moderate his pace, and move side by side with the Sasunnach!

Again they walked some distance in silence. Alister began to discover that his companion was weary, and his good heart spoke.

"Let me carry your gun," he said.

"See you damned!" returned Valentine, with an angry laugh.

"You fancy your gun protects your bag?"

"I do."

The same instant the gun was drawn, with swift quiet force, through the loop of his arm from behind. Feeling himself defenceless, he sprang at the highlander, but he eluded him, and in a moment was out of his reach, lost in the darkness. He heard the lock of one barrel snap: it was

not loaded; the second barrel went off, and he gave a great jump, imagining himself struck. The next instant the gun was below his arm again.

"It will be lighter to carry now!" said the Macruadh; "but if you like I will take it."

"Take it, then. But no!—By Jove, I wish there was light enough to see what sort of a rascal you look!"

"You are not very polite!"

"Mind your own politeness. I was never so roughly served in my life!—by a fellow too that had taken my money! If I knew where to find a magistrate in this beastly place,——"

"You would tell him I emptied your gun because you threatened me with it!"

"You were going off with my bag!"

"Because I undertook to carry your bag, was I bound to endure your company?"

"Alister!" said a quiet voice out of the darkness.

The highlander started, and in a tone

strangely tremulous, yet with a kind of triumph in it, answered—

"Ian!"

The one word said, he stood still, but as in the act to run, staring into the darkness. The next moment he flung down the game-bag, and two men were in each other's arms.

"Where are you from, Ian?" said the chief at length, in a voice broken with gladness.

All Valentine understood of the question, for it was in Gaelic, was its emotion, and he scorned a fellow to show the least sign of breaking down.

"Straight from Moscow," answered the new-comer. "How is our mother?"

"Well, Ian, thank God!"

"Then, thank God, all is well!"

"What brought you home in such haste?"

"I had a bad dream about my mother, and was a little anxious. There was more reason too, which I will tell you afterwards."

"What were you doing in Moscow? Have you a furlough?"

"No; I am a sort of deserter. I would have thrown up my commission, but had not a chance. In Moscow I was teaching in a school to keep out of the way of the police. But I will tell you all by and by."

The voice was low, veiled, and sad; the joy of the meeting rippled through it like a brook.

The brothers had forgotten the stranger, and stood talking till the patience of Valentine was as much exhausted as his strength.

"Are you going to stand there all night?" he said at last. "This is no doubt very interesting to you, but it is rather a bore to one who can neither see you, nor understand a word you say."

"Is the gentleman a friend of yours, Alister?" asked Ian.

"Not exactly.—But he is a Sasunnach," he concluded in English, "and we ought not to be speaking Gaelic."

"I beg his pardon," said Ian. "Will you introduce me?"

"It is impossible; I do not know his name. I never saw him, and don't see him now. But he insists on my company."

"That is a great compliment. How far?"

"To the New House."

"I paid him a shilling to carry my bag," said Valentine. "He took the shilling, and was going to walk off with my bag!"

"Well?"

"Well indeed! Not at all well! How was I to know——"

"But he didn't—did he?" said Ian, whose voice seemed now to tingle with amusement. "—Alister, you were wrong."

It was an illogical face-about, but Alister responded at once.

"I know it," he said. "The moment I heard your voice, I knew it.—How is it, Ian,"—here he fell back into Gaelic—"that when you are by me, I know what is right so much quicker? I don't understand it. I meant to do right, but——"

"But your pride got up. Alister, you always set out well—nobly—and then comes the devil's turn! Then you begin to do as if you repented! You don't carry the thing right straight out. I hate to see the devil make a fool of a man like you! Do *you* not know that in your own country you owe a stranger hospitality?"

"My own country!" echoed Alister with a groan.

"Yes, your own country—and perhaps more yours than it was your grandfather's! You know who said, 'The meek shall inherit the earth'! If it be not ours in God's way, I for one would not care to call it mine another way."—Here he changed again to English.—"But we must not keep the gentleman standing while we talk!"

"Thank you!" said Valentine. "The fact is, I'm dead beat."

"Have you anything I could carry for you?" asked Ian.

"No, I thank you.—Yes; there! if you

don't mind taking my gun?—you speak like a gentleman!"

"I will take it with pleasure."

He took the gun, and they started.

"If you choose, Alister," said his brother, once more in Gaelic, "to break through conventionalities, you must not expect people to allow you to creep inside them again the moment you please."

But the young fellow's fatigue had touched Alister.

"Are you a big man?" he said, taking Valentine gently by the arm.

"Not so big as you, I'll lay you a sovereign," answered Valentine, wondering why he should ask.

"Then look here!" said Alister; "you get astride my shoulders, and I'll carry you home. I believe you're hungry, and that takes the pith out of you!—Come," he went on, perceiving some sign of reluctance in the youth, "you'll break down if you walk much farther!—Here, Ian! you take the bag; you can manage that and the gun too!"

Valentine murmured some objection; but the brothers took the thing so much as a matter of course, and he felt so terribly exhausted—for he had lost his way, and been out since the morning—that he yielded.

Alister doubled himself up on his heels; Valentine got his weary legs over his stalwart shoulders; the chief rose with him as if he had been no heavier than mistress Conal's creel, and bore him along much relieved in his aching limbs.

So little was the chief oppressed by his burden, that he and his brother kept up a stream of conversation, every now and then forgetting their manners and gliding off into Gaelic, but as often recollecting themselves, apologizing, and starting afresh upon the path of English. Long before they reached the end of their journey, Valentine, able from his perch to listen in some measure of ease, came to understand that he had to do, not with rustics, but, whatever their peculiarities, with gentlemen of a noteworthy sort.

The brothers, in the joy of their reunion, talked much of things at home and abroad, avoiding things personal and domestic as often as they spoke English; but when they saw the lights of the New House, a silence fell upon them. At the door, Alister set his burden carefully down.

"There!" he said with a laugh, "I hope I have earned my shilling!"

"Ten times over," answered Valentine; "but I know better now than offer to pay you. I thank you with all my heart."

The door opened, Ian gave the gun and the bag to the butler, and the brothers bade Valentine good night.

Valentine had a strange tale to tell. Sercombe refused to accept his conclusions: if he had offered the men half a crown apiece, he said, they would have pocketed the money.

CHAPTER VII.

MOTHER AND SON.

The sun was shining bright, and the laird was out in his fields. His oats were nearly ready for the scythe, and he was judging where he had best begin to cut them.

His fields lay chiefly along the banks of the stream, occupying the whole breadth of the valley on the east side of the ridge where the cottage stood. On the west side of the ridge, nearly parallel to, and not many yards from it, a small brook ran to join the stream: this was a march betwixt the chief's land and Mr. Peregrine Palmer's. Their respective limit was not everywhere so well defined.

The air was clear and clean, and full of

life. The wind was asleep. A consciousness of work approaching completion filled earth and air—a mood of calm expectation, as of a man who sees his end drawing nigh, and awaits the saving judgment of the father of spirits. There was no song of birds—only a crow from the yard, or the cry of a blackcock from the hill; the two streams were left to do all the singing, and they did their best, though their water was low. The day was of the evening of the year; in the full sunshine was present the twilight and the coming night, but there was a sense of readiness on all sides. The fruits of the earth must be housed; that alone remained to be done.

When the laird had made up his mind, he turned towards the house—a lowly cottage, more extensive than many farmhouses, but looking no better. It was well built, with an outside wall of rough stone and lime, and another wall of turf within, lined in parts with wood, making it as warm a nest as any house of the size could be.

The door, picturesque with abundant repair, opened by a latch into the kitchen.

For long years the floor of the kitchen had been an earthen one, with the fire on a hearth in the middle of it, as in all the cottages; and the smoke rose into the roof, keeping it very dry and warm, if also very sooty, and thence into the air through a hole in the middle. But some ten years before this time, Alister and Ian, mere lads, had built a chimney outside, and opening the wall, removed the hearth to it—with the smoke also, which now had its own private way to liberty. They then paved the floor with such stones as they could find, in the fields and on the hill, sufficiently flat and smooth on one side, and by sinking them according to their thickness, managed to get a tolerably even surface. Many other improvements followed; and although it was a poor place still, it would at the time of Dr. Johnson's visit to the highlands have been counted a good house, not to be despised by unambitious knight or poor

baronet. Nor was the time yet over when ladies and gentlemen, of all courtesy and good breeding, might be found in such houses.

In the kitchen a deal-dresser, scoured white, stood under one of the tiny windows, giving light enough for a clean-souled cook —and what window-light would ever be enough for one of a different sort? There were only four panes in it, but it opened and closed with a button, and so was superior to many windows. There was a larger on the opposite side, which at times in the winter nights when the cold was great, they filled bodily with a barricade of turf. Here, in the kitchen, the chief takes his meals with his lady-mother. She and Ian have just finished their breakfast, and gone to the other end of the house. The laird broke his fast long ago.

A fire is burning on the hearth—small, for the mid-day-meal is not yet on its way. Everything is tidy; the hearth is swept up, and the dishes are washed: the barefooted

girl is reaching the last of them to its place on the rack behind the dresser. She is a red-haired, blue-eyed Celt, with a pretty face, and a refinement of motion and speech rarer in some other peasantries.

The chief enters, and takes from the wall an old-fashioned gun. He wants a bird or two, for Ian's home-coming is a great event.

"I saw a big stag last night down by the burn, sir," said the girl, "feeding as if he had been the red cow."

"I don't want him to-day, Nancy," returned her master. "Had he big horns?"

"Great horns, sir; but it was too dark to count the tines."

"When was it? Why did you not tell me?"

"I thought it was morning, sir, and when I got up it was the middle of the night. The moon was so shiny that I went to the door and looked out. Just at the narrow leap, I saw him plain."

"If you should see him again, Nancy,

scare him. I don't want the Sasunnachs at the New House to see him."

"Hadn't you better take him yourself, Macruadh? He would make fine hams for the winter!"

"Mind your own business, Nancy, and hold your tongue," said the chief, with a smile that took all the harshness from the words. "Don't you tell any one you saw him. For what you know he may be the big stag!"

"Sure no one would kill *him*, sir!" answered the girl aghast.

"I hope not. But get the stoving-pot ready, Nancy; I'm going to find a bird or two. Lest I should not succeed, have a couple of chickens at hand."

"Sir, the mistress has commanded them already."

"That is well; but do not kill them except I am not back in time."

"I understand, sir."

Macruadh knew the stag as well as the horse he rode, and that his habit had for

some time been to come down at night and feed on the small border of rich grass on the south side of the burn, between it and the abrupt heathery rise of the hill. For there the burn ran so near the hill, and the ground was so covered with huge masses of grey rock, that there was hardly room for cultivation, and the bank was left in grass.

The stalking of the stag was the passion of the highlander in that part of the country. He cared little for shooting the grouse, black or red, and almost despised those whose ambition was a full bag of such game; he dreamed day and night of killing deer. The chief, however, was in this matter more of a man without being less of a highlander. He loved the deer so much, saw them so much a part of the glory of mountain and sky, sunshine and storm, that he liked to see them living, not dead, and only now and then shot one, when the family had need of it. He felt himself indeed almost the father of the deer as well as of his clan, and mourned

greatly that he could do so little now, from the limited range of his property, to protect them. His love for live creatures was not quite equal to that of St. Francis, for he had not conceived the thought of turning wolf or fox from the error of his ways; but even the creatures that preyed upon others he killed only from a sense of duty, and with no pleasure in their death. The heartlessness of the common type of sportsman was loathsome to him. When there was not much doing on the farm, he would sometimes be out all night with his gun, it is true, but he would seldom fire it, and then only at some beast of prey; on the hill-side or in the valley he would lie watching the ways and doings of the many creatures that roam the night—each with its object, each with its reasons, each with its fitting of means to ends. One of the grounds of his dislike to the new possessors of the old land was the raid he feared upon the wild animals.

The laird gone, I will take my reader

into the *parlour*, as they called in English their one sitting-room. Shall I first tell him what the room was like, or first describe the two persons in it? Led up to a picture, I certainly should not look first at the frame; but a description is a process of painting rather than a picture; and when you cannot see the thing in one, but must take each part by itself, and in your mind get it into relation with the rest, there is an advantage, I think, in having a notion of the frame first. For one thing, you cannot see the persons without imagining their surroundings, and if those should be unfittingly imagined, they interfere with the truth of the persons, and you may not be able to get them right after.

The room, then, was about fifteen feet by twelve, and the ceiling was low. On the white walls hung a few frames, of which two or three contained water-colours—not very good, but not displeasing; several held miniature portraits—mostly in red coats, and one or two a silhouette. Opposite the

door hung a target of hide, round, and bossed with brass. Alister had come upon it in the house, covering a meal-barrel, to which service it had probably been put in aid of its eluding a search for arms after the battle of Culloden. Never more to cover man's food from mice, or his person from an enemy, it was raised to the *walhalla* of the parlour. Under it rested, horizontally upon two nails, the sword of the chief—a long and broad *Andrew Ferrara*, with a plated basket-hilt; beside it hung a dirk—longer than usual, and fine in form, with a carved hilt in the shape of an eagle's head and neck, and its sheath, whose leather was dry and flaky with age, heavily mounted in silver. Below these was a card-table of marquetry with spindle-legs, and on it a work-box of ivory, inlaid with silver and ebony. In the corner stood a harp, an Erard, golden and gracious, not a string of it broken. In the middle of the room was a small square table, covered with a green cloth. An old-fashioned easy chair stood

by the chimney; and one sat in it whom to see was to forget her surroundings.

In middle age she is still beautiful, with the rare beauty that shines from the root of the being. Her hair is of the darkest brown, almost black; her eyes are very dark, and her skin is very fair, though the soft bloom, as of reflected sunset, is gone from her cheek, and her hair shows lines of keen silver. Her features are fine, clear, and regular—the chin a little strong perhaps, not for the size, but the fineness of the rest; her form is that of a younger woman; her hand and foot are long and delicate. A more refined and courteous presence could not have been found in the island. The dignity of her carriage nowise marred its grace, or betrayed the least consciousness; she looked dignified because she was dignified. That form of falsehood which consists in assuming the look of what one fain would be, was, as much as any other, impossible to Isobel Macruadh. She wore no cap; her hair was gathered in a

large knot near the top of her head. Her gown was of a dark print; she had no ornament except a ring with a single ruby. She was working a bit of net into lace.

She could speak Gaelic as well as any in the glen—perhaps better; but to her sons she always spoke English. To them indeed English was their mother-tongue, in the sense that English only came addressed to themselves from her lips. There were, she said, plenty to teach them Gaelic; she must see to their English.

The one window of the parlour, though not large, was of tolerable size; but little light entered, so shaded was it with a rose-tree in a pot on the sill. By the wall opposite was a couch, and on the couch lay Ian with a book in his hand—a book in a strange language. His mother and he would sometimes be a whole morning together and exchange no more than a word or two, though many a look and smile. It seemed enough for each to be in the other's company. There was a quite

peculiar bond between the two. Like so many of the young men of that country, Ian had been intended for the army; but there was in him this much of the spirit of the eagle he resembled, that he passionately loved freedom, and had almost a gypsy's delight in wandering. When he left college, he became tutor in a Russian family of distinction, and after that accepted a commission in the household troops of the Czar. But wherever he went, he seemed, as he said once to his mother, almost physically aware of a line stretching between him and her, which seemed to vibrate when he grew anxious about her. The bond between him and his brother was equally strong, but in feeling different. Between him and Alister it was a cable; between him and his mother a harpstring; in the one case it was a muscle, in the other a nerve. The one retained, the other drew him. Given to roaming as he was, again and again he returned, from pure love-longing, to what he always felt as

the *protection* of his mother. It was protection indeed he often had sought—protection from his own glooms, which nothing but her love seemed able to tenuate.

He was tall—if an inch above six feet be tall, but not of his brother's fine proportion. He was thin, with long slender fingers and feet like his mother's. His small, strong bones were covered with little more than hard muscle, but every motion of limb or body was grace. At times, when lost in thought and unconscious of movement, an observer might have imagined him in conversation with some one unseen, towards whom he was carrying himself with courtesy: plain it was that courtesy with him was not a graft upon the finest stock, but an essential element. His forehead was rather low, freckled, and crowned with hair of a foxy red; his eyes were of the glass-gray or green loved of our elder poets; his nose was a very eagle in itself—large and fine. He more resembled the mask of

the dead Shakspere than any other I have met, only in him the proportions were a little exaggerated; his nose was a little too large, and his mouth a little too small for the mask; but the mingled sweetness and strength in the curves of the latter prevented the impression of weakness generally given by the association of such a nose and such a mouth. On his short upper lip was a small light moustache, and on his face not a hair more. In rest his countenance wore a great calmness, but a calmness that might seem rooted in sadness.

While the mother might, more than once in a day, differ to fault-finding from her elder-born—whom she admired, notwithstanding, as well as loved, from the bottom of her heart—she was never *known* to say a word in opposition to the younger. It was even whispered that she was afraid of him. It was not so; but her reverence for Ian was such that, even when she felt bound not to agree with him, she seldom had the confidence that, differing from *him*, she was in

the right. Sometimes in the middle of the night she would slip like a ghost into the room where he lay, and sit by his bed till the black cock, the gray cock, the red cock crew. The son might be awake all the time, and the mother suspect him awake, yet no word pass between them. She would rise and go as she came. Her feeling for her younger son was like that of Hannah for her eldest—intensest love mixed with strangest reverence. But there were vast alternations and inexplicable minglings in her thoughts of him. At one moment she would regard him as gifted beyond his fellows for some great work, at another be filled with a horrible fear that he was in rebellion against the God of his life. Doubtless mothers are far too ready to think *their* sons above the ordinary breed of sons: self, unpossessed of God, will worship itself in its offspring; yet the sons whom *holy* mothers have regarded as born to great things and who have passed away without sign, may have gone on toward

their great things. Whether this mother thought too much of her son or not, there were questions moving in his mind which she could not have understood—even then when he would creep to her bed in the morning to forget in her arms the terrible dreams of the night, or when at evening he would draw his little stool to her knee, unable or unwilling to enjoy his book anywhere but by her side.

What gave him his unconscious power over his mother, was, first, the things he said, and next, the things he did not say; for he seemed to her to dwell always in a rich silence. Yet throughout was she aware of a something between them, across which they could not meet; and it was in part her distress at the seeming impossibility of effecting a spiritual union with her son, that made her so desirous of personal proximity to him. Such union is by most thinking people presumed impossible without consent of opinion, and this mistake rendered her unable to *feel* near him, to be

at home with him. If she had believed that they understood each other, that they were of like *opinion*, she would not have been half so unhappy when he went away, would not have longed half so grievously for his return. Ian on his part understood his mother, but knew she did not understand him, and was therefore troubled. Hence it resulted that always after a time came the hour—which never came to her—when he could endure proximity without oneness no longer, and would suddenly announce his departure. And after a day or two of his absence, the mother would be doubly wretched to find a sort of relief in it, and would spend wakeful nights trying to oust it as the merest fancy, persuading herself that she was miserable, and nothing but miserable, in the loss of her darling.

Naturally then she would turn more to Alister, and his love was a strengthening tonic to her sick motherhood. He was never jealous of either. Their love for each other was to him a love. He too would

mourn deeply over his brother's departure, but it became at once his business to comfort his mother. And while she had no suspicion of the degree to which he suffered, it drew her with fresh love to her elder born, and gave her renewal of the quiet satisfaction in him that was never absent, when she saw how he too missed Ian. Their mutual affection was indeed as true and strong as a mother could desire it. "If such love," she said to herself, "had appeared in the middle of its history instead of now at its close, the transmitted affection would have been enough to bind the clan together for centuries more!"

It was with a prelusive smile that shone on the mother's heart like the opening of heaven, that Ian lowered his book to answer her question. She had said—

"Did you not feel the cold very much at St. Petersburg last winter, Ian?"

"Yes, mother, at times," he answered. "But everybody wears fur; the peasant his sheep-skin, the noble his silver fox. They

have to fight the cold! Nose and toes are in constant danger. Did I never tell you what happened to me once in that way? I don't think I ever did!"

"You never tell me anything, Ian!" said his mother, looking at him with a loving sadness.

"I was suddenly stopped in the street by what I took for an unheard-of insult: I actually thought my great proboscis was being pulled! If I had been as fiery as Alister, the man would have found his back, and I should have lost my nose. Without the least warning a handful of snow was thrust in my face, and my nose had not even a chance of snorting with indignation, it found itself so twisted in every direction at once! But I have a way, in any sudden occurrence, of feeling perplexed enough to want to be sure before doing anything, and if it has sometimes hindered me from what was expedient, it has oftener saved me from what would have been wrong: in another instant I was able to do justice to the

promptitude of a fellow Christian for the preservation of my nose, already whitening in frosty death: he was rubbing it hard with snow, the orthodox remedy! My whole face presently sharpened into one burning spot, and taking off my hat, I thanked the man for his most kind attention. He pointed out to me that time spent in explaining the condition of my nose, would have been pure loss: the danger was pressing, and he attacked it at once! I was indeed entirely unconscious of the state of my beak—the worst symptom of any!"

"I trust, Ian, you will not go back to Russia!" said his mother, after a little more talk about frost-biting. "Surely there is work for you at home!"

"What can I do at home, mother? You have no money to buy me a commission, and I am not much good at farm-work. Alister says I am not worth a horseman's wages!"

"You could find teaching at home; or

you could go into the church. We might manage that, for you would only have to attend the divinity classes."

"Mother! would you put me into one of the priests' offices that I may eat a piece of bread? As for teaching, there are too many hungry students for that: I could not take the bread out of their mouths! And in truth, mother, I could not endure it—except it were required of me. I can live on as little as any, but it must be with some liberty. I have surely inherited the spirit of some old sea-rover, it is so difficult for me to rest! I am a very thistle-down for wandering! I must know how my fellow-creatures live! I should like to *be* one man after another—each for an hour or two!"

"Your father used to say there was much Norse blood in the family."

"There it is, mother! I cannot help it!"

"I don't like your holding the Czar's commission, Ian — somehow I don't like it! He is a tyrant!"

"I am going to throw it up, mother."

"I am glad of that! How did you ever get it?"

"Oddly enough, through the man that pulled my nose. I had a chance afterwards of doing him a good turn, which he was most generous in acknowledging; and as he belonged to the court, I had the offer of a lieutenant's commission. The Scotch are in favour."

A deep cloud had settled on the face of the young man. The lady looked at him for a moment with keenest mother-eyes, suppressed a deep sigh, and betook herself again to her work.

Ere she thought how he might take it, another question broke from her lips.

"What sort of church had you to go to in St. Petersburg, Ian?" she said.

Ian was silent a moment, thinking how to be true, and not hurt her more than could not be helped.

"There are a thousand places of worship there, mother," he returned, with a curious smile.

"Any presbyterian place?" she asked.

"I believe so," he replied.

"Ian, you haven't given up praying?"

"If ever I prayed, mother, I certainly have not given it up."

"Ever prayed, Ian! When a mere child you prayed like an aged Christian!"

"Ah, mother, that was a sad pity! I asked for things of which I felt no need! I was a hypocrite! I ought to have prayed like a little child!"

The mother was silent: she it was who had taught him to pray thus—making him pray aloud in her hearing! and this was the result! The premature blossom had withered! she said to herself. But it was no blossom, only a muslin flower!

"Then you didn't go to church!" she said at length.

"Not often, mother dear," he answered. "When I do go, I like to go to the church of the country I happen to be in. Going to church and praying to God are not the same thing."

"Then you do say your prayers? Oh, do not tell me you never bow down before your maker!"

"Shall I tell you where I think I did once pray to God, mother?" he said, after a little pause, anxious to soothe her suffering. "At least I did think then that I prayed!" he added.

"It was not this morning, then, before you left your chamber?"

"No, mother," answered Ian; "I did not pray this morning, and I never say prayers."

The mother gave a gasp, but answered nothing. Ian went on again.

"I should like to tell you, mother, about that time when I am almost sure I prayed!"

"I should like to hear about it," she answered, with strangest minglings of emotion. At one and the same instant she felt parted from her son by a gulf into which she must cast herself to find him, and that he stood on a height of sacred

experience which she never could hope to climb. "Oh for his father to talk to him!" she said to herself. He was a power on her soul which she almost feared. If he were to put forth his power, might he not drag her down into unbelief?

It was the first time they had come so close in their talk. The moment his mother spoke out, Ian had responded. He was anxious to be open with her so far as he could, and forced his natural taciturnity, the prime cause of which was his thoughtfulness: it was hard to talk where was so much thinking to be done, so little time to do it in, and so little progress made by it! But wherever he could keep his mother company, there he would not leave her! Just as he opened his mouth, however, to begin his narration, the door of the room also opened, flung wide by the small red hand of Nancy, and two young ladies entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MORNING CALL.

Had Valentine known who the brothers were, or where they lived, he would before now have called to thank them again for their kindness to him; but he imagined they had some distance to go after depositing him, and had not yet discovered his mistake. The visit now paid had nothing to do with him.

The two elder girls, curious about the pretty cottage, had come wandering down the spur, or hill-toe, as far as its precincts —if precincts they may be called where was no fence, only a little grove and a less garden. Beside the door stood a milk-pail and a churn, set out to be sweetened by

the sun and wind. It was very rural, they thought, and very homely, but not so attractive as some cottages in the south:—it indicated a rusticity honoured by the most unceremonious visit from its superiors. Thus without hesitation concluding, Christina, followed by Mercy, walked in at the open door, found a barefooted girl in the kitchen, and spoke pleasantly to her. She, in simple hospitality forgetting herself, made answer in Gaelic; and, never doubting the ladies had come to call upon her mistress, led the way, and the girls, without thinking, followed her to the parlour.

As they came, they had been talking. Had they been in any degree truly educated, they would have been quite capable of an opinion of their own, for they had good enough faculties; but they had never been really taught to read; therefore, with the utmost confidence, they had been passing judgment upon a book from which they had not gathered the slightest notion as to the idea or intention of the writer. Christina

was of that numerous class of readers, who, if you show one thing better or worse than another, will without hesitation report that you love the one and hate the other. If you say, for instance, that it is a worse and yet more shameful thing for a man to break his wife's heart by systematic neglect, than to strike her and be sorry for it, such readers give out that you approve of wife-beating, and perhaps write to expostulate with you on your brutality. If you express pleasure that a poor maniac should have succeeded in escaping through the door of death from his haunting demon, they accuse you of advocating suicide. But Mercy was not yet afloat on the sea of essential *lie* whereon Christina swung to every wave.

One question they had been discussing was, whether the hero of the story was worthy the name of lover, seeing he deferred offering his hand to the girl because she told her mother a *fib* to account for her being with him in the garden after dark. "It was cowardly and unfair," said Christina:

"was it not for *his* sake she did it?" Mercy did not think to say "*Was it?*" as she well might. "Don't you see, Chrissy," she said, "he reasoned this way: 'If she tell her mother a lie, she may tell me a lie some day too!'?" So indeed the youth did reason; but it occurred to neither of his critics to note the fact that he would not have minded the girl's telling her mother the lie, if he could have been certain she would never tell *him* one! In regard to her hiding from him certain passages with another gentleman, occurring between this event and his proposal, Christina judged he had no right to know them, and if he had, their concealment was what he deserved.

When the girl, who would have thought it rude to ask their names—if I mistake not, it was a point in highland hospitality to entertain without such inquiry—led the way to the parlour, they followed expecting they did not know what: they had heard of the cowhouse, the stable, and even the pigsty, being under the same roof in these parts!

When the opening door disclosed "lady" Macruadh, every inch a chieftain's widow, their conventional breeding failed them a little; though incapable of recognizing a refinement beyond their own, they were not incapable of feeling its influence; and they had not yet learned how to be rude with propriety in unproved circumstances—still less how to be gracious without a moment's notice. But when a young man sprang from a couch, and the stately lady rose and advanced to receive them, it was too late to retreat, and for a moment they stood abashed, feeling, I am glad to say, like intruders. The behaviour of the lady and gentleman, however, speedily set them partially at ease. The latter, with movements more than graceful, for they were gracious, and altogether free of scroll-pattern or Polonius-flourish, placed chairs, and invited them to be seated, and the former began to talk as if their entrance were the least unexpected thing in the world. Leaving them to explain their

visit or not as they saw fit, she spoke of the weather, the harvest, the shooting; feared the gentlemen would be disappointed: the birds were quite healthy, but not numerous—they had too many enemies to multiply! asked if they had seen the view from such and such a point;—in short, carried herself as one to whom cordiality to strangers was an easy duty. But she was not taken with them. Her order of civilization was higher than theirs; and the simplicity as well as old-fashioned finish of her consciousness recoiled a little—though she had not experience enough of a certain kind to be able at once to say what it was in the manner and expression of the young ladies that did not please her.

Mammon, gaining more and more of the upper hand in all social relations, has done much to lower the *petite* as well as the *grande morale* of the country—the good breeding as well as the honesty. Unmannerliness with the completest self-possession, is a poor substitute for stiffness, a

poorer for courtesy. Respect and graciousness from each to each is of the very essence of Christianity, independently of rank, or possession, or relation. A certain roughness and rudeness have usurped upon the intercourse of the century. It comes of the spread of imagined greatness; true greatness, unconscious of itself, cannot find expression other than gracious. In the presence of another, a man of true breeding is but faintly aware of his own self, and keenly aware of the other's self. Before the human — that bush which, however trodden and peeled, yet burns with the divine presence—the man who thinks of the homage due to him, and not of the homage owing by him, is essentially rude. Mammon is slowly stifling and desiccating Rank; both are miserable deities, but the one is yet meaner than the other. Unrefined families with money are received with open arms and honours paid, in circles where a better breeding than theirs has hitherto prevailed: this, working along with the

natural law of corruption where is no aspiration, has gradually caused the deterioration of which I speak. Courtesy will never regain her former position, but she will be raised to a much higher; like Duty she will be known as a daughter of the living God, "the first stocke father of gentilnes;" for in his neighbour every man will see a revelation of the Most High.

Without being able to recognize the superiority of a woman who lived in a cottage, the young ladies felt and disliked it; and the matron felt the commonness of the girls, without knowing what exactly it was. The girls, on the other hand, were interested in the young man: he looked like a gentleman! Ian was interested in the young women: he thought they were shy, when they were only "put out," and wished to make them comfortable—in which he quickly succeeded. His unconsciously commanding air in the midst of his great courtesy, roused their admiration, and they had not been many minutes in his company ere

they were satisfied that, however it was to be accounted for, the young man was in truth very much of a gentleman. It was an unexpected discovery of northern produce, and "the estate" gathered interest in their eyes. Christina did the greater part of the talking, but both did their best to be agreeable.

Ian saw quite as well as his mother what ordinary girls they were, but, accustomed to the newer modes in manner and speech, he was not shocked by movements and phrases that annoyed her. The mother apprehended fascination, and was uneasy, though far from showing it.

When they rose, Ian attended them to the door, leaving his mother anxious, for she feared he would accompany them home. Till he returned, she did not resume her seat.

The girls took their way along the ridge in silence, till the ruin was between them and the cottage, when they burst into laughter. They were ladies enough not to

laugh till out of sight, but not ladies enough to see there was nothing to laugh at.

"A harp, too!" said Christina. "Mercy, I believe we are on the top of mount Ararat, and have this very moment left the real Noah's ark, patched into a cottage! Who *can* they be?"

"Gentlefolk evidently," said Mercy, "—perhaps old-fashioned people from Inverness."

"The young man must have been to college!—In the north, you know," continued Christina, thinking with pride that her brother was at Oxford, "nothing is easier than to get an education, such as it is! It costs in fact next to nothing. Ploughmen send their sons to St. Andrew's and Aberdeen to make gentlemen of them! Fancy!"

"You must allow this case a successful one!"

"I didn't mean *his* father was a ploughman! That is impossible! Besides, I heard him call that very respectable person

mother! She is not a ploughman's wife, but evidently a lady of the middle class."

Christina did not count herself or her people to belong to the middle class. How it was it is not quite easy to say—perhaps the tone of implied contempt with which the father spoke of the lower classes, and the quiet negation with which the mother would allude to shopkeepers, may have had to do with it—but the young people all imagined themselves to belong to the upper classes! It was a pity there was no title in the family—but any of the girls might well marry a coronet! There were indeed persons higher than they; a duke was higher; the queen was higher—but that was pleasant! it was nice to have a few to look up to!

On anyone living in a humble house, not to say a poor cottage, they looked down, as the case might be, with indifference or patronage; they little dreamed how, had she known all about them, the respectable person in the cottage would have looked

down upon *them!* At the same time the laugh in which they now indulged was not altogether one of amusement; it was in part an effort to avenge themselves of a certain uncomfortable feeling of rebuke.

"I will tell you my theory, Mercy!" Christina went on. "The lady is the widow of an Indian officer—perhaps a colonel. Some of their widows are left very poor, though, their husbands having been in the service of their country, they think no small beer of themselves! The young man has a military air which he may have got from his father; or he may be an officer himself: young officers are always poor; that's what makes them so nice to flirt with. I wonder whether he really *is* an officer! We've actually called upon the people, and come away too, without knowing their names!"

"I suppose they're from the New House!" said Ian, returning after he had bowed the ladies from the threshold, with the reward

of a bewitching smile from the elder, and a shy glance from the younger.

"Where else could they be from?" returned his mother; "—come to make our poor country yet poorer!"

"They're not English!"

"Not they!—vulgar people from Glasgow!"

"I think you are too hard on them, mother! They are not exactly vulgar. I thought, indeed, there was a sort of gentleness about them you do not often meet in Scotch girls!"

"In the lowlands, I grant, Ian; but the daughter of the poorest tacksman of the Macruadhs has a manner and a modesty I have seen in no Sasunnach girl yet. Those girls are bold!"

"Self-possessed, perhaps!" said Ian.

Upon the awkwardness he took for shyness, had followed a reaction. It was with the young ladies a part of good breeding, whatever mistake they made, not to look otherwise than contented with themselves:

having for a moment failed in this principle, they were eager to make up for it.

"Girls are different from what they used to be, I fancy, mother!" added Ian thoughtfully.

"The world changes very fast!" said the mother sadly. She was thinking, like Rebecca, if her sons took a fancy to these who were not daughters of the land, what good would her life do her.

"Ah, mother dear," said Ian, "I have never'—and as he spoke the cloud deepened on his forehead—"seen more than one woman whose ways and manners reminded me of you!"

"And what was she?" the mother asked, in pleased alarm.

But she almost repented the question when she saw how low the cloud descended on his countenance.

"A princess, mother. She is dead," he answered, and turning walked so gently from the room that it was impossible for his mother to detain him.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SERCOMBE.

The next morning, soon after sunrise, the laird began to cut his barley. Ian would gladly have helped, but Alister had a notion that such labour was not fit for him.

"I had a comical interview this morning," said the chief, entering the kitchen at dinner-time. "I was out before my people, and was standing by the burn-side near the foot-bridge, when I heard somebody shouting, and looked up. There was a big English fellow in gray on the top of the ridge, with his gun on his shoulder, holloing. I knew he was English by his holloing. It was plain it was to me, but not choosing to be at his beck and call, I took

no heed. 'Hullo, you there! wake up!' he cried. 'What should I wake up for?' I returned. 'To carry my bag. You don't seem to have anything to do! I'll give you five shillings.'"

"You see to what you expose yourself by your unconventionalities, Alister!" said his brother, with mock gravity.

"It was not the fellow we carried home the other night, Ian; it was one twice his size. It would take all I have to carry *him* as far!"

"The other must have pointed you out to him!"

"It was much too dark for him to know me again!"

"You forget the hall-lamp!" said Ian.

"Ah, yes, to be sure! I had forgotten!" answered Alister. "To tell the truth, I thought, when I took his shilling, he would never know me from Nebuchadnezzar: that is the one thing I am ashamed of in the affair—I did in the dark what perhaps I should not have done in the daylight!—

I don't mean I would not have carried him and his bag too! I refer only to the shilling! Now, of course, I will hold my face to it; but I thought it better to be short with a fellow like that."

"Well?"

"'You'll want prepayment, no doubt!' he went on, putting his hand in his pocket. Those Sasunnach fellows think every highlandman keen as a hawk after their dirty money!"

"They have but too good reason in some parts!" said the mother. "It is not so bad here yet, but there is a great difference in that respect. The old breed is fast disappearing. What with the difficulty of living by the hardest work, and the occasional chance of earning a shilling easily, many have turned both idle and greedy."

"That's for you and your shilling, Alister!" said Ian.

"I confess," returned Alister, "if I had foreseen what an idea of the gentlemen of the country I might give, I should have

hesitated. But I haven't begun to be ashamed yet!"

"Ashamed, Alister!" cried Ian. "What does it matter what a fellow like that thinks of you?"

"And mistress Conal has her shilling!" said the mother.

"If the thing was right," pursued Ian, "no harm can come of it; if it was not right, no end of harm may come. Are you sure it was good for mistress Conal to have that shilling, Alister? What if it be drawing away her heart from him who is watching his old child in her turf-hut? What if the devil be grinning at her from that shilling?"

"Ian! if God had not meant her to have the shilling, he would not have let Alister earn it."

"Certainly God can take care of her from a shilling!" said Ian, with one of his strangely sweet smiles. "I was only trying Alister, mother."

"I confess I did not like the thought of

it at first," resumed Mrs. Macruadh; "but it was mere pride; for when I thought of your father, I knew he would have been pleased with Alister."

"Then, mother, I am glad; and I don't care what Ian, or any Sasunnach under the sun, may think of me."

"But you haven't told us," said Ian, "how the thing ended."

"I said to the fellow," resumed Alister, "that I had my shearing to do, and hadn't the time to go with him. 'Is this your season for sheep-shearing?' said he. 'We call cutting the corn shearing,' I answered, 'because in these parts we use the reaping hook.' 'That is a great waste of labour!' he returned. I did not tell him that some of our land would smash his machines like toys. 'How?' I asked. 'It costs so much more,' he said. 'But it feeds so many more!' I replied. 'Oh yes, of course, if you don't want the farmer to make a living!' 'I manage to make a living,' I said. 'Then you are the farmer?'

'So it would appear.' 'I beg your pardon; I thought——' 'You thought I was an idle fellow, glad of an easy job to keep the life in me!' 'You were deuced glad of a job the other night, they tell me!' 'So I was. I wanted a shilling for a poor woman, and hadn't one to give her without going home a mile and a half for it!' By this time he had come down, and I had gone a few steps to meet him; I did not want to seem unfriendly. 'Upon my word, it was very good of you! The old lady ought to be grateful!' he said. 'So ought we all,' I answered, '—I to your friend for the shilling, and he to me for taking his bag. He did me one good turn for my poor woman, and I did him another for his poor legs!' 'So you're quits!' said he. 'Not at all,' I answered; 'on the contrary, we are under mutual obligation.' 'I don't see the difference!—Hillo, there's a hare!' And up went his gun to his shoulder. 'None of that!' I cried, and knocked up the barrel. 'What do you mean?' he

roared, looking furious. 'Get out of the way, or I'll shoot *you*.' 'Murder as well as poaching!' I said. 'Poaching!' he shouted. 'That rabbit is mine,' I answered; 'I will not have it killed.' 'Cool!—on Mr. Palmer's land!' said he. 'The land is mine, and I am my own gamekeeper!' I rejoined. 'You look like it!' he said. 'You go after your birds!—not in this direction though,' I answered, and turned and left him."

"You were rough with him!" said Ian.

"I did lose my temper rather."

"It was a mistake on his part."

"I expected to hear him fire," Alister continued, "for there was the rabbit he took for a hare lurching slowly away! I'm glad he didn't: I always feel bad after a row!—Can a conscience ever get too fastidious, Ian?"

"The only way to find that out is always to obey it."

"So long as it agrees with the Bible, Ian!" interposed the mother.

"The Bible is a big book, mother, and the things in it are of many sorts," returned Ian. "The Lord did not go with *every* thing in it."

"Ian! Ian! I am shocked to hear you!"

"It is the truth, mother."

"What *would* your father say!"

"'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.'"

Ian rose from the table, knelt by his mother, and laid his head on her shoulder.

She was silent, pained by his words, and put her arm round him as if to shelter him from the evil one. Homage to will and word of the Master, apart from the acceptance of certain doctrines concerning him, was in her eyes not merely defective but dangerous. To love the Lord with the love of truest obedience; to believe him the son of God and the saver of men with absolute acceptance of the heart, was far from enough! it was but sentimental affection!

A certain young preacher in Scotland

some years ago, accused by an old lady of preaching works, took refuge in the Lord's sermon on the mount: "Ow ay!" answered the partisan, "but he was a varra yoong mon whan he preacht that sermon!"

Alister rose and went: there was to him something specially sacred in the communion of his mother and brother. Heartily he held with Ian, but shrank from any difference with his mother. For her sake he received Sunday after Sunday in silence what was to him a bushel of dust with here and there a bit of mouldy bread in it; but the mother did not imagine any great coincidence of opinion between her and Alister any more than between her and Ian. She had not the faintest notion how much genuine faith both of them had, or how it surpassed her own in vitality.

But while Ian seemed to his brother, who knew him best, hardly touched with earthly stain, Alister, notwithstanding his large and dominant humanity, was still in the troublous condition of one trying to

do right against a powerful fermentation of pride. He held noblest principles; but the sediment of generations was too easily stirred up to cloud them. He was not quite honest in his attitude towards some of his ancestors, judging them far more leniently than he would have judged others. He loved his neighbour, but his neighbour was mostly of his own family or his own clan. He *might* have been unjust for the sake of his own—a small fault in the eyes of the world, but a great fault indeed in a nature like his, capable of being so much beyond it. For, while the faults of a good man cannot be such evil things as the faults of a bad man, they are more blameworthy, and greater faults than the same would be in a bad man: we must not confuse the guilt of the person with the abstract evil of the thing.

Ian was one of those blessed few who doubt in virtue of a larger faith. While its roots were seeking a deeper soil, it could not show so fast a growth above ground.

He doubted most about the things he loved best, while he devoted the energies of a mind whose keenness almost masked its power, to discover possible ways of believing them. To the wise his doubts would have been his best credentials; they were worth tenfold the faith of most. It was truth, and higher truth, he was always seeking. The sadness which coloured his deepest individuality, only one thing could ever remove—the conscious presence of the Eternal. This is true of all sadness, but Ian knew it.

He overtook Alister on his way to the barley-field.

"I have been trying to find out wherein lay the falseness of the position in which you found yourself this morning," he said. "There could be nothing wrong in doing a small thing for its reward any more than a great one; where I think you went wrong was in *assuming* your social position afterwards: you should have waited for its being accorded you. There was no occasion to

be offended with the man. You ought to have seen how you must look to him, and given him time. I don't perceive why you should be so gracious to old mistress Conal, and so hard upon him. Certainly you would not speak as he did to any man, but he has been brought up differently; he is not such a gentleman as you cannot help being. In a word, you ought to have treated him as an inferior, and been more polite to him."

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOUGH-BULLS.

Partly, it may be, from such incidents at the outset of their acquaintance, there was for some time no further meeting betwixt any of the chief's family and that of the new laird. There was indeed little to draw them together except common isolation. Valentine would have been pleased to show gratitude to his helpers on that stormy night, but after his sisters' account of their call, he felt not only ashamed, which was right, but ashamed to show his shame, which was a fresh shame. The girls on their part made so much of what they counted the ridiculous elements of their "adventure," that, natural vengeance on their untruthfulness,

they came themselves to see in it almost only what was ridiculous. In the same spirit Mr. Sercombe recounted his adventure with Alister, which annoyed his host, who had but little acquaintance with the boundaries of his land. From the additional servants they had hired in the vicinity, the people of the New House gathered correct information concerning the people at the cottage, but the honour in which they were held only added to the ridicule they associated with them. On the other side also there was little inclination towards a pursuit of intercourse. Mrs. Macruadh, from Nancy's account and the behaviour of the girls, divined the explanation of their visit; and, as their mother did not follow it up, took no notice of it. In the mind of Mercy, however, lurked a little thorn, with the bluntest possible sting of suspicion, every time she joined in a laugh at the people of the cottage, that she was not quite just to them.

The shooting, such as it was, went on,

the sleeping and the eating, the walking and the talking. Long letters were written from the New House to female friends—letters with the flourishes if not the matter of wit, and funny tales concerning the natives, whom, because of their poor houses and unintelligibility, they represented as semi-savages. The young men went back to Oxford; and the time for the return of the family to civilization seemed drawing nigh.

It happened about this time, however, that a certain speculation in which Mr. Peregrine Palmer was very materially interested, failed utterly, depriving him of the consciousness of a good many thousands, and producing in him the feeling of a lady of moderate means when she loses her purse: he must save it off something! For though he spent freely, he placed a great value on money—as well he might, seeing it gave him all the distinction which before everything else he prized. He did not know what a poor thing it is to be distin-

guished among men, therefore did not like losing his thousands. Having by failure sinned against Mammon, he must do something to ease the money-conscience that ruled his conduct; and the first thing that occurred to him was, to leave his wife and daughters where they were for the winter. None of them were in the least delicate; his wife professed herself fond of a country life; it would give the girls a good opportunity for practice, drawing, and study generally, and he would find them a suitable governess! He talked the matter over with Mrs. Palmer. She did not mind much, and would not object. He would spend Christmas with them, he said, and bring down Christian, and perhaps Mr. Sercombe.

The girls did not like the idea. It was so cold in the country in winter, and the snow would be so deep! they would be starved to death! But, of course—if the governor had made up his mind to be cruel!

The thing was settled. It was only for

one winter! It would be a new experience for them, and they would enjoy their next *season* all the more! The governor had promised to send them down new furs, and a great boxful of novels! He did not apprise them that he meant to sell their horses. Their horses were his! He was an indulgent father and did not stint them, but he was not going to ask their leave! At the same time he had not the courage to tell them.

He took his wife with him as far as Inverness for a day or two, that she might lay in a good stock of everything antagonistic to cold.

When father and mother were gone from the house, the girls felt *larky*. They had no wish to do anything they would not do if their parents were at home, but they had some sense of relief in the thought that they could do whatever they liked. A more sympathetic historian might say, and I am nowise inclined to contradict him, that it was only the reaction from the pain of

parting, and the instinct to make the best of their loneliness. However it was, the elder girls resolved on a walk to the village, to see what might be seen, and in particular the young woman at the shop, of whom they had heard their brother and Mr. Sercombe speak with admiration, qualified with the remark that she was so proper they could hardly get a civil word out of her. She was in fact too scrupulously polite for their taste.

It was a bright, pleasant, frosty morning, perfectly still, with an air like wine. The harvest had vanished from the fields. The sun shone on millions of tiny dew-suns, threaded on forsaken spider-webs. A few small, white, frozen clouds flecked the sky. The purple heather was not yet gone, and not any snow had yet fallen in the valley. The burn was large, for there had been a good deal of rain, but it was not much darker than its usual brown of smoke-crystal. They tripped gaily along. If they had little spiritual, they had much innocent

animal life, which no great disappointments or keen twinges of conscience had yet damped. They were but human kittens—and not of the finest breed.

As they crossed the root of the spur, and looked down on the autumn fields to the east of it, they spied something going on which they did not understand. Stopping, and gazing more intently, they beheld what seemed a contest between man and beast, but its nature they could not yet distinguish. Gradually it grew plain that two of the cattle of the country, wild and shaggy, were rebelling against control. They were in fact two young bulls, of the small black highland breed, accustomed to gallop over the rough hills, jumping like goats, which Alister had set himself the task of breaking to the plough—by no means an easy one, or to be accomplished single-handed by any but a man of some strength, and both persistence and patience. In the summer he had lost a horse, which he could ill afford to replace: if he could make these bulls

work, they would save him the price of the horse, would cost less to keep, and require less attention! He bridled them by the nose, not with rings through the gristle, but with nose-bands of iron, bluntly spiked inside, against which they could not pull hard without pain, and had made some progress, though he could by no means trust them yet: every now and then a fit of mingled wildness and stubbornness would seize them, and the contest would appear about to begin again from the beginning; but they seldom now held out very long. The nose-band of one of them had come off, Alister had him by a horn in each hand, and a fierce struggle was going on between them, while the other was pulling away from his companion as if determined to take to the hills. It was a good thing for them that share and coulter were pretty deep in the ground, to the help of their master; for had they got away, they would have killed, or at least disabled themselves. Presently, however, he had the nose-band

on, and by force and persuasion together got the better of them; the staggy little furies gave in; and quickly gathering up his reins, he went back to the plough-stilts, where each hand held at once a handle and a rein. With energetic obedience the little animals began to pull—so vigorously that it took nearly all the chief's strength to hold at once his plough and his team.

It was something of a sight to the girls after a long dearth of events. Many things indeed upon which they scarce cast an eye when they came, they were now capable of regarding with a little feeble interest. Nor, although ignorant of everything agricultural, were they quite unused to animals; having horses they called their own, they would not unfrequently go to the stables to give their orders, or see that they were carried out.

They waited for some time hoping the fight would begin again, and drew a little nearer; then, as by common consent, left the road, passed the ruin, ran down the steep side of the ridge, and began to toil

through the stubble towards the ploughman. A sharp straw would every now and then go through a delicate stocking, and the damp soil gathered in great lumps on their shoes, but they plodded on, laughing merrily as they went.

The Macruadh was meditating the power of the frost to break up the clods of the field, when he saw the girls close to him. He pulled in his cattle, and taking off his bonnet with one hand while the other held both reins—

"Excuse me, ladies," he said; "my animals are young, and not quite broken."

They were not a little surprised at such a reception, and were driven to conclude that the man must be the laird himself. They had heard that he cultivated his own land, but had not therefore imagined him labouring in his own person.

In spite of the blindness produced by their conventional training, vulgarly called education, they could not fail to perceive something in the man worthy of their

regard. Before them, on the alert toward his cattle, but full of courtesy, stood a dark, handsome, weather-browned man, with an eagle air, not so pronounced as his brother's. His hair was long, and almost black,—in thick, soft curls over a small, well-set head. His glance had the flash that comes of victorious effort, and his free carriage was that of one whom labour has nowise subdued, whose every muscle is instinct with ready life. True even in trifles, he wore the dark beard that nature had given him; disordered by the struggle with his bulls, it imparted a certain wild look that contrasted with his speech. Christina forgot that the man was a labourer like any other, but noted that he did not manifest the least embarrassment in their presence, or any consciousness of a superfluity of favour in their approach: she did not know that neither would his hired servant, or the poorest member of his clan. It was said of a certain Sutherland clan that they were all gentlemen, and of a certain Argyll clan that they were all poets;

of the Macruadhs it was said they were both. As to Mercy, the first glance of the chief's hazel eyes, looking straight into hers with genial respect, went deeper than any look had yet penetrated.

Ladies in Alister's fields were not an everyday sight. Hardly before had his work been enlivened by such a presence; and the joy of it was in his eyes, though his behaviour was calm. Christina thought how pleasant it would be to have him for a worshipping slave—so interpenetrated with her charms that, like Una's lion, he would crouch at her feet, come and go at her pleasure, live on her smiles, and be sad when she gave him none. She would make a gentleman of him, then leave him to dream of her! It would be a pleasant and interesting task in the dullness of their winter's banishment, with the days so short and the nights so unendurably long! The man was handsome!—she would do it!—and would proceed at once to initiate the conquest of him!

The temptation to patronize not unfrequently presents an object for the patronage superior to the would-be patron; for the temptation is one to which slight persons chiefly are exposed; it affords an outlet for the vague activity of self-importance. Few have learned that one is of no value except to God and other men. Miss Palmer worshipped herself, and therefore would fain be worshipped—so dreamed of a friendship *de haut en bas* with the country fellow.

She put on a smile—no difficult thing, for she was a good-natured girl. It looked to Alister quite natural. It was nevertheless, like Hamlet's false friends, "sent for."

"Do you like ploughing?" she asked.

Had she known the manners of the country, she would have added "laird," or "Macruadh."

"Yes I do," Alister answered; "but I should plough all the same if I did not. It has to be done."

"But why should *you* do it?"

"Because I must," laughed the laird.

What ought she to answer? Should she condole with the man because he had to work? It did not seem prudent! She would try another tack!

"You had some trouble with your oxen! We saw it from the road, and were quite frightened. I hope you are not hurt."

"There was no danger of that," answered Alister with a smile.

"What wild creatures they are! Ain't it rather hard work for them? They are so small!"

"They are as strong as horses," answered the laird. "I have had my work to break them! Indeed, I can hardly say I have done it yet! they would very much like to run their horns into me!"

"Then it *must* be dangerous! It shows that they were not meant to work!"

"They were meant to work if I can make them work."

"Then you approve of slavery!" said Mercy

She hardly knew what made her oppose

him. As yet she had no opinions of her own, though she did catch a thought sometimes, when it happened to come within her reach. Alister smiled a curious smile.

"I should," he said, "if the right people were made slaves of. I would take shares in a company of Algerine pirates to rid the social world of certain types of the human!"

The girls looked at each other. "Sharp!" said Christina to herself.

"What sorts would you have them take?" she asked.

"Idle men in particular," answered Alister.

"Would you not have them take idle ladies as well?"

"I would see first how they behaved when the men were gone."

"You believe, then," said Mercy, "we have a right to make the lower animals work?"

"I think it is our duty," answered Alister. "At all events, if we do not, we must either kill them off by degrees, or cede them this

world, and emigrate. But even that would be a bad thing for my little bulls there! It is not so many years since the last wolf was killed—here, close by! and if the dogs turned to wolves again, where would they be? The domestic animals would then have wild beasts instead of men for their masters! To have the world a habitable one, man must rule."

"Men are nothing but tyrants to them!" said Christina.

"Most are, I admit."

Ere he could prevent her, she had walked up to the near bull, and begun to pat him. He poked a sharp wicked horn sideways at her, catching her cloak on it, and grazing her arm. She started back very white. Alister gave him a terrible tug. The beast shook his head, and began to paw the earth.

"It won't do to go near him," he said. "—But you needn't be afraid; he can't touch you. That iron band round his nose has spikes in it.'

"Poor fellow!" said Christina; "it is no wonder he should be out of temper! It must hurt him dreadfully!"

"It does hurt him when he pulls against it, but not when he is quiet."

"I call it cruel!"

"I do not. The fellow knows what is wanted of him—just as well as any naughty child."

"How can he when he has no reason!"

"Oh, hasn't he!"

"Animals have no reason; they have only instinct!"

"They have plenty of reason—more than many men and women. They are not so far off us as pride makes most people think! It is only those that don't know them that talk about the instinct of animals!"

"Do you know them?"

"Pretty well for a man; but they're often too much for me."

"Anyhow that poor thing does not know better."

"He knows enough; and if he did not,

would you allow him to do as he pleased because he didn't know better? He wanted to put his horn into you a moment ago!"

"Still it must be hard to want very much to do a thing, and not be able to do it!" said Mercy.

"I used to feel as if I could tear my old nurse to pieces when she wouldn't let me do as I wanted!" said Christina.

"I suppose you do whatever you please now, ladies?"

"No, indeed. We wanted to go to London, and here we are for the winter!"

"And you think it hard?"

"Yes, we do."

"And so, from sympathy, you side with my cattle?"

"Well—yes!"

"You think I have no right to keep them captive, and make them work?"

"None at all," said Christina.

"Then it is time I let them go!"

Alister made for the animals' heads.

"No, no! please don't!" cried both the

girls, turning, the one white, the other red.

"Certainly not if you do not wish it!" answered Alister, staying his step. "If I did, however, you would be quite safe, for they would not come near me. They would be off up that hill as hard as they could tear, jumping everything that came in their way."

"Is it not very dull here in the winter?" asked Christina, panting a little, but trying to look as if she had known quite well he was only joking.

"I do not find it dull."

"Ah, but you are a man, and can do as you please!"

"I never could do as I pleased, and so I please as I do," answered Alister.

"I do not quite understand you."

"When you cannot do as you like, the best thing is to like what you have to do. One's own way is not to be had in this world. There's a better, though, which is to be had!"

"I have heard a parson talk like that," said Mercy, "but never a layman!"

"My father was a parson as good as any layman. He would have laid me on my back in a moment—here as I stand!" said Alister, drawing himself to his height.

He broke suddenly into Gaelic, addressing the more troublesome of the bulls. No better pleased to stand still than to go on, he had fallen to digging at his neighbour, who retorted with the horn convenient, and presently there was a great mixing of bull and harness and cloddy earth. Turning quickly towards them, Alister dropped a rein. In a moment the plough was out of the furrow, and the bulls were straining every muscle, each to send the other into the wilds of the unseen creation. Alister sprang to their heads, and taking them by their noses forced them back into the line of the furrow. Christina, thinking they had broken loose, fled; but there was Mercy with the reins, hauling with all her might!

"Thank you, thank you!" said the laird, laughing with pleasure. "You are a friend indeed!"

"Mercy! Mercy! come away directly," cried Christina.

But Mercy did not heed her. The laird took the reins, and administering a blow each to the animals, made them stand still.

There are tender-hearted people who virtually object to the whole scheme of creation; they would neither have force used nor pain suffered; they talk as if kindness could do everything, even where it is not felt. Millions of human beings but for suffering would never develop an atom of affection. The man who would spare *due* suffering is not wise. It is folly to conclude a thing ought not to be done because it hurts. There are powers to be born, creations to be perfected, sinners to be redeemed, through the ministry of pain, that could be born, perfected, redeemed, in no other way. But Christina was neither wise

nor unwise after such fashion. She was annoyed at finding the laird not easily to be brought to her feet, and Mercy already advanced to his good graces. She was not jealous of Mercy, for was she not beautiful and Mercy plain? but Mercy had by her *pluck* secured an advantage, and the handsome ploughman looked at her admiringly! Partly therefore because she was not pleased with him, partly that she thought a little outcry would be telling,—

"Oh, you wicked man!" she cried, "you are hurting the poor brutes!"

"No more than is necessary," he answered.

"You are cruel!"

"Good morning, ladies."

He just managed to take off his bonnet, for the four-legged explosions at the end of his plough were pulling madly. He slackened his reins, and away it went, like a sharp knife through a Dutch cheese.

"You've made him quite cross!" said Mercy.

"What a brute of a man!" said Christina.

She never restrained herself from teasing cat or puppy for her amusement—did not even mind hurting it a little. Those capable of distinguishing between the qualities of resembling actions are few. There are some who will regard Alister as capable of vivisection.

On one occasion when the brothers were boys, Alister having lost his temper in the pursuit of a runaway pony, fell upon it with his fists the moment he caught it. Ian put himself between, and received, without word or motion, more than one blow meant for the pony.

"Donal was only in fun!" he said, as soon as Alister's anger had spent itself. "Father would never have punished him like that!"

Alister was ashamed, and never again was guilty of such an outbreak. From that moment he began the serious endeavour to subjugate the pig, tiger, mule, or whatever

animal he found in himself. There remained, however, this difference between them—that Alister punished without compunction, while Ian was sorely troubled at having to cause any suffering.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIR-GROVE.

As the ladies went up the ridge, regarded in the neighbourhood as the chief's pleasure-ground where nobody went except to call upon the chief, they must, having mounted it lower down than where they descended, pass the cottage. The grove of birch, mountain-ash, and fir which surrounded it, was planted quite irregularly, and a narrow foot-path went winding through it to the door. Against one of the firs was a rough bench turned to the west, and seated upon it they saw Ian, smoking a formless mass of much defiled sea-foam, otherwise *meer-schaum*. He rose, uncovered, and sat down again. But Christina, who regarded it as

a praiseworthy kindness to address any one beneath her, not only returned his salutation, but stopped, and said,

"Good morning! We have been learning how they plough in Scotland, but I fear we annoyed the ploughman."

"Fergus does sometimes *look* surly," said Ian, rising again, and going to her; "he has bad rheumatism, poor fellow! And then he can't speak a word of English, and is ashamed of it!"

"The man we saw spoke English very well. Is Fergus your brother's name?"

"No; my brother's name is Alister—that is Gaelic for Alexander."

"He was ploughing with two wild little oxen, and could hardly manage them."

"Then it must have been Alister—only, excuse me, he could manage them perfectly. Alister could break a pair of buffaloes."

"He seemed rather vexed, and I thought it might be that we made the creatures troublesome.—I do not mean he was rude—only a little rough to us."

Ian smiled, and waited for more.

"He did not like to be told he was hard on the animals. I only said the poor things did not know better!"

"Ah—I see!—He understands animals so well, he doesn't like to be meddled with in his management of them. I daresay he told you that, if they didn't know better, he had to teach them better! They are troublesome little wretches.—Yes, I confess he is a little touchy about animals!"

Somehow Christina felt herself rebuked, and did not like it. He had almost told her that, if she had quarrelled with his ploughman-brother, the fault must be hers!

"But indeed, Captain Macruadh," she said—for the people called him captain, "I am not ignorant about animals! We have horses of our own, and know all about them.—Don't we, Mercy?"

"Yes," said Mercy; "they take apples and sugar from our hands."

"And you would have the chief's bulls tamed with apples and sugar!" returned

Ian, laughing. "But the horses were tamed before ever you saw them! If you had taken them wild, or even when they were foals, and taught them everything, then you would know a little about them. An acquaintance is not a friendship! My brother loves animals and understands them almost like human beings; he understands them better than some human beings, for the most cunning of the animals are yet simple. He knows what they are thinking when I cannot read a word of their faces. I remember one terrible night, winters ago—there had been a blinding drift on and off during the day, and my father and mother were getting anxious about him—how he came staggering in, and fell on the floor, and a great lump in his plaid on his back began to wallow about, and forth crept his big colley! They had been to the hills to look after a few sheep, and the poor dog was exhausted, and Alister carried him home at the risk of his life."

"A valuable animal, I don't doubt," said Christina.

"He had been, but was no more what the world calls valuable. He was an old dog almost past work — but the wisest creature! Poor fellow, he never recovered that day on the hills! A week or so after, we buried him—in the hope of a blessed resurrection," added Ian, with a smile.

The girls looked at each other as much as to say, "Good heavens!" He caught the look, but said nothing, for he saw they had "no understanding."

The brothers believed most devoutly that the God who is present at the death-bed of the sparrow does not forget the sparrow when he is dead; for they had been taught that he is an unchanging God; "and," argued Ian, "what God remembers, he thinks of, and what he thinks of, *is*." But Ian knew that what misses the heart falls under the feet! A man is bound to *share* his best, not to tumble his *seed-pearls* into the feeding-trough, to break the teeth of

them that are there at meat. He had but lifted a corner to give them a glimpse of the Life eternal, and the girls thought him ridiculous! The human caterpillar that has not yet even begun to sicken with the growth of her psyche-wings, is among the poorest of the human animals!

But Christina was not going to give in! Her one idea of the glory of life was the subjugation of men. As if moved by a sudden impulse, she went close up to him.

"Do not be angry with me," she said, almost coaxingly, but with a visible mingling of boldness and shyness, neither of them quite assumed; for, though conscious of her boldness, she was not frightened; and there was something in the eagle-face that made it easy to look shy. "I did not mean to be rude. I am sorry."

"You mistake me," he said gently. "I only wanted you to know you misjudged my brother."

"Then, if you have forgiven me, you will

let me sit for a few minutes! I am *so* tired with walking in the sticky earth!"

"Do, pray, sit down," responded Ian heartily, and led the way.

But she sank gracefully at the foot of the next fir, while Mercy sat down on the bench.

"Do go on with your pipe," she said, looking up as she arranged her dress; "I am quite used to smoke. Papa would smoke in church if he dared!"

"Chrissy! You *know* he *never* smokes in the drawing-room!" cried Mercy, scandalized.

"I have seen him—when mamma was away."

Ian began to be a little more interested in the plain one. But what must his mother think to see them sitting there together! He could not help it! if ladies chose to sit down, it was not for him to forbid them! And there *was* a glimmer of conscience in the younger!

Most men believe only what they find or

imagine possible to themselves. They may be sure of this, that there are men so different from them that no judgment they pass upon them is worth a straw, simply because it does not apply to them. I assert of Ian that neither beauty nor intellect attracted him. Imagination would entice him, but the least lack of principle would arrest its influence. The simplest manifestation of a live conscience would draw him more than anything else. I do not mean the conscience that proposes questions, but the conscience that loves right and turns from wrong.

Notwithstanding the damsel's invitation, he did not resume his pipe. He was simple, but not free and easy—too sensitive to the relations of life to be familiar upon invitation with any girl. If she was not one with whom to hold real converse, it was impossible to blow dandelions with her, and talk must confine itself to the commonplace. After gentlest assays to know what was possible, the result might be that he grew

courteously playful, or drew back, and confined himself to the formal.

In the conversation that followed, he soon found the younger capable of being interested, and, having seen much in many parts of the world, had plenty to tell her. Christina smiled sweetly, taking everything with over-gentle politeness, but looking as if all that interested her was, that there they were, talking about it. Provoked at last by her persistent lack of *genuine* reception, Ian was tempted to try her with something different: perhaps she might be moved to horror! Any feeling would be a *find!* He thought he would tell them an adventure he had read in a book of travels.

In Persia, alone in a fine moonlit night, the traveller had fallen asleep on his horse, but woke suddenly, roused by something frightful, he did not know what. The evil odour all about him explained, however, his bewilderment and terror. Presently he was bumped on this side, then bumped on that; first one knee, then the other, would be

struck; now the calf of one leg was caught, now the calf of the other; then both would be caught at once, and he shoved nearly over his pommel. His horse was very uneasy, but could ill help himself in the midst of a moving mass of uncertain objects. The traveller for a moment imagined himself in a boat on the sea, with a huge quantity of wrecked cargo floating around him, whence came the frequent collisions he was undergoing; but he soon perceived that the vague shapes were boxes, pannierwise on the backs of mules, moving in caravan along the desert. Of not a few the lids were broken, of some gone altogether, revealing their contents—the bodies of good Mussulmans, on their way to the consecrated soil of Mecca for burial. Carelessly shambled the mules along, stumbling as they jogged over the uneven ground, their boxes tilting from side to side, sorely shaken, some of them, in frustration of dying hopes, scattering their contents over the track—for here and there a mule carried but a wreck of

his coffins. On and on over the rough gravelly waste, under the dead cold moon, weltered the slow stream of death!

"You may be sure," concluded Ian, "he made haste out of the ruck! But it was with difficulty he got clear, happily to windward—then for an hour sat motionless on his horse, watching through the moonlight the long dark shadow flitting toward its far-off goal. When at length he could no longer descry it, he put his horse to his speed—but not to overtake it."

As he spoke, Mercy's eyes grew larger and larger, never leaving his face. She had at least imagination enough for that! Christina curled her pretty lip, and looked disgusted. The one at a horrible tale was horrified, the other merely disgusted! The one showed herself capable of some reception; the other did not.

"Something might be done with that girl!" thought Ian.

"Did he see their faces?" drawled Christina.

Mercy was silent, but her eyes remained fixed on him. It was Ian's telling, more than the story, that impressed her.

"I don't think he mentions them," answered Ian. "But shall I tell you," he went on, "what seems to me the most unpleasant thing about the business?"

"Do," said Christina.

"It is that the poor ghosts should see such a disagreeable fuss made with their old clothes."

Christina smiled.

"Do you think ghosts see what goes on after they are dead?" asked Mercy.

"The ghosts are not dead," said Ian, "and I can't tell. But I am inclined to think some ghosts have to stay a while and look on."

"What would be the good of that?" returned Mercy.

"Perhaps to teach them the little good they were in, or got out of the world," he answered. "To have to stick to a thing after it is dead, is terrible, but may teach much."

"I don't understand you," said Mercy. "The world is not dead!"

"Better and better!" thought Ian with himself. "The girl *can* understand! — A thing is always dead to you when you have done with it," he answered her. "Suppose you had a ball-dress crumpled and unsightly —the roses on it withered, and the tinsel shining hideously through them—would it not be a dead dress?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Then suppose, for something you had done, or for something you would not stop being, you had to wear that ball-dress till something came about—you would be like the ghosts that cannot get away.—Suppose, when you were old and wrinkled,—"

"You are *very* amusing, Captain Macruadh!" said Christina, with a bell-like laugh. But Ian went on.

"Some stories tell us of ghosts with the same old wrinkled faces in which they died. The world and its uses over, they are compelled to haunt it still, seeing how

things go but taking no share in them, beholding the relief their death is to all, feeling they have lost their chance of beauty, and are fixed in ugliness, having wasted being itself! They are like a man in a miserable dream, in which he can do nothing, but in which he must stay, and go dreaming, dreaming on without hope of release. To be in a world and have nothing to do with it, must be awful! A little more imagination would do some people good!"

"No, please!—no more for me!" said Christina, laughing as she rose.

Mercy was silent. Though she had never really thought about anything herself, she did not doubt that certain people were in earnest about something. She knew that she ought to be good, and she knew she was not good; how to be good she did not know, for she had never set herself to be good. She sometimes wished she were good; but there are thousands of wandering ghosts who would be good if they might without taking trouble: the kind of good-

ness they desire would not be worth a life to hold it.

Fear is a wholesome element in the human economy; they are merely silly who would banish it from all association with religion. True, there is no religion in fear; religion is love, and love casts out fear; but until a man has love, it is well he should have fear. So long as there are wild beasts about, it is better to be afraid than secure.

The vague awe ready to assail every soul that has not found rest in its source, readier the more honest the soul, had for the first time laid hold of Mercy. The earnest face of the speaker had most to do with it. She had never heard anybody talk like that!

The lady of the house appeared, asking, with kind dignity, if they would not take some refreshment: to a highlander hospitality is a law where not a passion. Christina declined the offer.

"Thanks! we were only a little tired,

and are quite rested now," she said. "How beautifully sheltered your house is!"

"On the side of the sea, yes," answered Mrs. Macruadh; "but not much on the east where we want it most. The trees are growing, however!"

When the sisters were out of sight of the cottage—

"Well!" remarked Christina, "he's a nice young man too, is he not? Exceedingly well bred! And what taste he has! He knows how to amuse ladies!"

Mercy did not answer.

"I never heard anything so disgusting!" pursued Christina.

"But," suggested Mercy, "you like to *read* horrid stories, Chrissy! You said so only yesterday! And there was nothing in what he told us that oughtn't to be spoken about."

"What!—not those hideous coffins—and the bodies dropping out of them—all crawling, no doubt?"

"That is your own, Chrissy! You *know*

he did not go so far as that! If Colonel Webberly had told you the story, you would have called it charming—in fun, of course, I mean!"

But Christina never liked the *argumentum ad feminam*.

"I would not! You know I would not!" she exclaimed. "I do believe the girl has fallen in love with the horrid man! Of the two, I declare, I like the ploughman better. I am sorry I happened to vex him; he is a good stupid sort of fellow! I can't bear this man! How horribly he fixed his eyes on you when he was talking that rubbish about the ball-dress!"

"He was anxious to make himself understood. I know he made me think I must mind what I was about!"

"Oh, nonsense! We didn't come into this wilderness to be preached to by a lay John the Baptist! He is an ill-bred fellow!"

She would not have said so much against him, had not Mercy taken his part.

Mercy rarely contradicted her sister, but even this brief passage with a real man had roused the justice in her.

"I don't agree with you, Chrissy," she said. "He seems to me *very much* of a gentleman!"

She did not venture to say all she felt, not choosing to be at absolute variance, and the threatened quarrel blew over like a shower in spring.

But some sort of impression remained from the words of Ian on the mind of Mercy, for the next morning she read a chapter in the book of Genesis, and said a prayer her mother had taught her.

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG THE HILLS.

When Mr. and Mrs. Palmer reached Inverness, they found they could spend a few days there, one way and another, to good purpose, for they had friends to visit as well as shopping to do. Mr. Palmer's affairs calling him to the south were not immediately pressing, and their sojourn extended itself to a full week of eight days, during which the girls were under no rule but their own. Their parents regarded them as perfectly to be trusted, nor were the girls themselves aware of any reason why they should not be so regarded.

The window of Christina's bedroom overlooked a part of the road between the New

House and the old castle; and she could see from it all the ridge as far as the grove that concealed the cottage: if now they saw more of the young men their neighbours, and were led farther into the wilds, thickets, or pasturage of their acquaintance, I cannot say she had no hand in it.

She was depressed by a sense of failure: the boor, as she called him, was much too thick-skinned for any society but that of his bulls! and she had made no progress with the Valentine any more than with the Orson; he was better pleased with her ugly sister than with her beautiful self!

She would have given neither of the men another thought, but that there was no one else with whom to do any of that huckster business called flirting, which to her had just harm enough in it to make it interesting to her. She was one of those who can imagine beauty nor enjoyment in a thing altogether right. She took it for granted that bad and beautiful were often one; that the pleasures of the world owed their

delight to a touch, a wash, a tincture of the wicked in them. Such have so many crooked lines in themselves that they fancy nature laid down on lines of crookedness. They think the obliquity the beauty of the campanile, the blurring the charm of the sketch.

I tread on delicate ground — ground which, alas! many girls tread boldly, scattering much feather-bloom from the wings of poor Psyche, gathering for her hoards of unlovely memories, and sowing the seed of many a wish that they had done differently. They cannot pass over such ground and escape having their nature more or less vulgarized. I do not speak of anything counted wicked; it is only gambling with the precious and lovely things of the deepest human relation! If a girl with such an experience marry a man she loves —with what power of loving may be left such a one—will she not now and then remember something it would be joy to discover she had but dreamed? will she be

able always to forget certain cabinets in her brain which "it would not do" to throw open to the husband who thinks her simple as well as innocent? Honesty and truth, God's essentials, are perhaps more lacking in ordinary intercourse between young men and women than anywhere else. Greed and selfishness are as busy there as in money-making and ambition. Thousands on both sides are constantly seeking more than their share—more also than they even intend to return value for. Thousands of girls have been made sad for life by the speeches of a man careful all the time to *say* nothing that amounted to a pledge! I do not forget that many a woman who would otherwise have been worth little, has for her sorrow found such consolation that she has become rich before God; these words hold nevertheless: "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

On a morning two days later, Christina called Mercy, rather imperiously, to get

ready at once for their usual walk. She obeyed, and they set out. Christina declared she was perishing with cold, and they walked fast. By and by they saw on the road before them the two brothers walking slow; one was reading, the other listening. When they came nearer they descried in Alister's hand a manuscript volume; Ian carried an old-fashioned fowling-piece. It was a hard frost, which was perhaps the cause of Alister's leisure so early in the day.

Hearing the light steps of the girls behind them, the men turned. The laird was the first to speak. The plough and the fierce bulls not there to bewilder their judgment, the young women immediately discovered their perception in the matter of breeding to be less infallible than they had imagined it: no well bred woman could for a moment doubt the man before them a gentleman—though his carriage was more courteous and more natural than is often seen in a Mayfair drawing-room, and his

English a little old-fashioned. Ian was at once more like and more unlike other people. His manner was equally courteous, but notably stiffer: he was as much at his ease, but more reserved. To use a figure, he did not step out so far to meet them.

They walked on together.

"You are a little earlier than usual this morning, ladies!" remarked the chief.

"How do you know that, Mr. Macruadh?" rejoined Christina.

"I often see you pass — and till now always at the same hour."

"And yet we have never met before!"

"The busy and the"—he hesitated a moment—"unbusy seldom meet," said the chief.

"Why don't you say *the idle?*" suggested Christina.

"Because that would be rude."

"Why would it be rude? Most people, suppose, are more idle than busy!"

"*Idle* is a word of blame; I had no right to use it."

"I should have taken you for one of those who always speak their minds!"

"I hope I do when it is required, and I have any to speak."

"You prefer judging with closed doors!"

The chief was silent: he did not understand her. Did she want him to say he did not think them idle? or, if they were, that they were quite right?

"I think it hard," resumed Christina, with a tone of injury, almost of suffering, in her voice, "that we should be friendly and open with people, and they all the time thinking of us in a way it would be rude to tell us! It is enough to make one vow never to speak to—to anybody again!"

Alister turned and looked at her. What could she mean?

"You can't think it hard," he said, "that people should not tell you what they think of you the moment they first see you!"

"They might at least tell us what they mean by calling us idle!"

"I said *not busy*."

"Is *every*body to blame that is idle?" persisted Christina.

"Perhaps my brother will answer you that question," said Alister.

"If my brother and I tell you honestly what we thought of you when first we saw you," said Ian, "will you tell us honestly what you thought of us?"

The girls cast an involuntary glance at each other, and when their eyes met, could not keep them from looking conscious. A twitching also at the corners of Mercy's mouth showed they had been saying more than they would care to be cross-questioned upon.

"Ah, you betray yourselves, ladies!" Ian said. "It is all very well to challenge us, but you are not prepared to lead the way!"

"Girls are never allowed to lead!" said Christina. "The men are down on them the moment they dare!"

"I am not that way inclined," answered Ian. "If man or woman lead *to* anything,

success will justify the leader. I will propose another thing!"

"What is it?" asked Christina.

"To agree that, when we are about to part, with no probability of meeting again in this world, we shall speak out plainly what we think of each other!"

"But that will be such a time!" said Christina.

"In a world that turns quite round every twenty-four hours, it may be a very short time!"

"We shall be coming every summer, though I hope not to stay through another winter!"

"Changes come when they are least expected!"

"We cannot know," said Alister, "that we shall never meet again!"

"There the probability will be enough."

"But how can we come to a better—I mean a *fairer* opinion of each other, when we meet so seldom?" asked Mercy innocently.

"This is only the second time we have met, and already we are not quite strangers!" said Christina.

"On the other hand," said Alister, "we have been within call for more than two months, and this is our second meeting!"

"Well, who has not called?" said Christina.

The young men were silent. They did not care to discuss the question as to which mother was to blame in the matter.

They were now in the bottom of the valley, had left the road, and were going up the side of the burn, often in single file, Alister leading, and Ian bringing up the rear, for the valley was thickly strewn with lumps of gray rock, of all shapes and sizes. They seemed to have rolled down the hill on the other side of the burn, but there was no sign of their origin: the hill was covered with grass below, and with heather above. Such was the winding of the way among the stones—for path there was none—that again and again no one of them could see

another. The girls felt the strangeness of it, and began to experience, without knowing it, a little of the power of solitary places.

After walking thus for some distance, they found their leader halted.

"Here we have to cross the burn," he said, "and go a long way up the other side."

"You want to be rid of us!" said Christina.

"By no means," replied Alister. "We are delighted to have you with us. But we must not let you get tired before turning to go back."

"If you really do not mind, we should like to go a good deal farther. I want to see round the turn there, where another hill comes from behind and closes up the view. We haven't anybody to go with us, and have seen nothing of the country. The men won't take us shooting; and mamma is always so afraid we lose ourselves, or fall down a few precipices, or get into a bog, or be eaten by wild beasts!"

"If this frost last, we shall have time to show you something of the country. I see you can walk!"

"We can walk well enough, and should so like to get to the top of a mountain!"

"For the crossing then!" said Alister, and turning to the burn, jumped and re-jumped it, as if to let them see how to do it.

The bed of the stream was at the spot narrowed by two rocks, so that, though there was little of it, the water went through with a roar, and a force to take a man off his legs. It was too wide for the ladies, and they stood eyeing it with dismay, fearing an end to their walk and the pleasant companionship.

"Do not be frightened, ladies," said Alister; "it is not too wide for you."

"You have the advantage of us in your dress!" said Christina.

"I will get you over quite safe," returned the chief.

Christina looked as if she could not trust herself to him.

"I will try," said Mercy.

"Jump high," answered Alister, as he sprang again to the other side, and held out his hand across the chasm.

"I can neither jump high nor far!" said Mercy.

"Don't be in a hurry. I will take you—no, not by the hand; that might slip—but by the wrist. Do not think how far you can jump; all you have to do is to jump. Only jump as high as you can."

Mercy could not help feeling frightened—the water rushed so fast and loud below.

"Are you sure you can get me over?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Then I will jump."

She sprang, and Alister, with a strong pull on her arm, landed her easily.

"It is your turn now," he said, addressing Christina.

She was rather white, but tried to laugh.

"I—I—I don't think I can!" she said.

"It is really nothing," persuaded the chief.

"I am sorry to be a coward, but I fear I was born one."

"Some feelings nobody can help," said Ian, "but nobody need give way to them. One of the bravest men I ever knew would always start aside if the meanest little cur in the street came barking at him; and yet on one occasion, when the people were running in all directions, he took a mad dog by the throat, and held him. Come, Alister! you take her by one arm and I will take her by the other."

The chief sprang to her side, and the moment she felt the grasp of the two men, she had the needful courage. The three jumped together, and all were presently walking merrily along the other bank, over the same kind of ground, in single file—Ian bringing up the rear.

The ladies were startled by a gun going off close behind them.

"I beg your pardon," said Ian, "but I could not let the rascal go."

"What have you killed?" his brother asked.

"Only one of my own family—a red-haired fellow!" answered Ian, who had left the path, and was going up the hill.

The girls looked, but saw nothing, and following him a few yards, came to him behind a stone.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Christina, with horror in her tone, "it's a fox!—Is it possible you have shot a fox?"

The men laughed.

"And why not?" asked Alister, as if he had no idea what she could mean. "Is the fox a sacred animal in the south?"

"It's worse than poaching!" she cried.

"Hardly!" returned Alister. "No doubt you may get a good deal of fun out of Reynard, but you can't make game of him! Why—you look as if you had lost a friend! I admire his intellect, but we can't afford to feed it on chickens and lambs."

"But to *shoot* him!"

"Why not? We do not respect him here. He is a rascal, to be sure, but then he has no money, and consequently no friends!"

"He has many friends! What *would* Christian or Mr. Sercombe say to shooting, actually shooting a fox!"

"You treat him as if he were red gold!" said the chief. "We build temples neither to Reynard nor Mammon here. We leave the men of the south to worship them!"

"They don't worship them!" said Mercy.

"Do they not respect the rich man because he is rich, and look down on the poor man because he is poor?" said Ian. "Though the rich be a wretch, they think him grand; though the poor man be like Jesus Christ, they pity him!"

"And shouldn't the poor be pitied?" said Christina.

"Not except they need pity."

"Is it not pitiable to be poor?"

"By no means. It is pitiable to be wretched—and that, I venture to suspect,

the rich are oftener than the poor.—But as to master Reynard there—instead of shooting him, what would you have had us do with him?"

"Hunt him, to be sure."

"Would he like that better?"

"What he would like is not the question. The sport is the thing."

"That will show you why he is not sacred here: we do not hunt him. It would be impossible to hunt this country; you could not ride the ground. Besides, there are such multitudes of holes, the hounds would scarcely have a chance. No; the only dog to send after the fellow is a leaden one."

"There's another!" exclaimed the chief; "—there, sneaking away!—and your gun not loaded, Ian!"

"I am so glad!" said Christina. "He at least will escape you!"

"And some poor lamb in the spring won't escape him!" returned Alister.

"Lambs are meant to be eaten!" said Christina.

"Yes; but a lamb might think it hard to feed such a creature!"

"If the fox is of no good in the world," said Mercy, "why was he made?"

"He can't be of no good," answered the chief. "What if some things are, just that we may get rid of them?"

"*Could* they be made just to be got rid of?"

"I said—that *we* might get rid of them: there is all the difference in that. The very first thing men had to do in the world was to fight beasts."

"I think I see what you mean," said Mercy: "if there had been no wild beasts to fight with, men would never have grown able for much!"

"That is it," said Alister. "They were awful beasts! and they had poor weapons to fight them with—neither guns nor knives!"

"And who knows," suggested Ian, "what good it may be to the fox himself to make the best of a greedy life?"

"But what is the good to us of talking

about such things?" said Christina. "They're not interesting!"

The remark silenced the brothers: where indeed could be use without interest?

But Mercy, though she could hardly have said she found the conversation *very* interesting, felt there was something in the men that cared to talk about such things, that must be interesting if she could only get at it. They were not like any other men she had met!

Christina's whole interest in men was the admiration she looked for and was sure of receiving from them; Mercy had hitherto found their company stupid.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAKE.

Silence lasted until they reached the shoulder of the hill that closed the view up the valley. As they rounded it, the sun went behind a cloud, and a chill wind, as if from a land where dwelt no life, met them. The hills stood back, and they were on the shore of a small lake, out of which ran the burn. They were very desolate-looking hills, with little heather, and that bloomless, to hide their hard gray bones. Their heads were mostly white with frost and snow; their shapes had little beauty; they looked worn and hopeless, ugly and sad—and so cold! The water below was slaty gray, in response to the gray sky above:

there seemed no life in either. The hearts of the girls sank within them, and all at once they felt tired. In the air was just one sign of life : high above the lake wheeled a large fish-hawk.

"Look!" said Alister pointing; "there is the osprey that lives here with his wife! He is just going to catch a fish!"

He had hardly spoken when the bird, with headlong descent, shot into the water, making it foam up all about. He reappeared with a fish in his claws, and flew off to find his mate.

"Do you know the very bird?" asked Mercy.

"I know him well. He and his wife have built on that conical rock you see there in the middle of the water many years."

"Why have you never shot him? He would look well stuffed!" said Christina.

She little knew the effect of her words; the chief *hated* causeless killing; and to hear a lady talk of shooting a high-soaring

creature of the air as coolly as of putting on her gloves, was nauseous to him. Ian gave him praise afterwards for his unusual self-restraint. But it was a moment or two ere he had himself in hand.

"Do you not think he looks much better going about God's business?" he said.

"Perhaps; but he is not yours; you have not got him!"

"Why should I have him? He seems, indeed, the more mine the higher he goes. A dead stuffed thing—how could that be mine at all? Alive, he seems to soar in the very heaven of my soul!"

"You showed the fox no such pity!" remarked Mercy.

"I never killed a fox to *have* him!" answered Alister. "The osprey does no harm. He eats only fish, and they are very plentiful; he never kills birds or hares, or any creature on the land. I do not see how any one could wish to kill the bird, except from mere love of destruction! Why should I make a life less in the world?"

"There would be more lives of fish—would there not?" said Mercy. "I don't want you to shoot the poor bird; I only want to hear your argument!"

The chief could not immediately reply. Ian came to his rescue.

"There are qualities in life," he said. "One cannot think the fish-life so fine, so full of delight as the bird-life!"

"No. But," said Mercy, "have the fishes not as good a right to their life as the birds?"

"Both have the right given them by the maker of them. The osprey was made to eat the fish, and the fish, I hope, get some good of being eaten by the osprey."

"Excuse me, Captain Macruadh, but that seems to me simple nonsense!" said Christina.

"I hope it is true."

"I don't know about being true, but it must be nonsense."

"It must seem so to most people."

"Then why do you say it?"

"Because I hope it is true."

"Why should you wish nonsense to be true?"

"What is true cannot be nonsense. It looks nonsense only to those that take no interest in the matter. Would it be nonsense to the fishes?"

"It does seem hard," said Mercy, "that the poor harmless things should be gobbled up by a creature pouncing down upon them from another element!"

"As the poor are gobbled up everywhere by the rich!"

"I don't believe that. The rich are very kind to the poor."

"I beg your pardon," said Ian, "but if you know no more about the rich than you do about the fish, I can hardly take your testimony. The fish are the most carnivorous creatures in the world."

"Do they eat each other?"

"Hardly that. Only the cats of Kilkenny can do that."

"I used a common phrase!"

"You did, and I am rude: the phrase must bear the blame for both of us. But the fish are even cannibals—eating the young of their own species! They are the most destructive of creatures to other lives."

"I suppose," said Mercy, "to make one kind of creature live on another kind, is the way to get the greatest good for the greatest number!"

"That doctrine, which seems to content most people, appears to me a poverty-stricken and selfish one. I can admit nothing but the greatest good to every individual creature."

"Don't you think we had better be going, Mercy? It has got quite cold; I am afraid it will rain," said Christina, drawing her cloak round her with a little shiver.

"I am ready," answered Mercy.

The brothers looked at each other. They had come out to spend the day together, but they could not leave the ladies

to go home alone; having brought them across the burn, they were bound to see them over it again! An imperceptible sign passed between them, and Alister turned to th e girls.

"Come then," he said, "we will go back!"

"But you were not going home yet!" said Mercy.

"Would you have us leave you in this wild place?"

"We shall find our way well enough. The burn will guide us."

"Yes; but it will not jump over you; it will leave you to jump over it!"

"I forgot the burn!" said Christina.

"Which way were you going?" asked Mercy, looking all around for road or pathway over the encircling upheaved wildernesses.

"This way," answered Ian. "Good-bye."

"Then you are not coming?"

"No. My brother will take care of you."

He went straight as an arrow up the hill.

They stood and watched him go. At what seemed the top, he turned and waved his cap, then vanished.

Christina felt disappointed. She did not much care for either of the very peculiar young men, but any company was better than none; a man was better than a woman; and two men were better than one! If these were not equal to admiring her as she deserved, what more remunerative labour than teaching them to do so?

The thing that chiefly disappointed her in them was, that they had so little small talk. It was so stupid to be always speaking sense! always polite! always courteous!—"Two sir Charles Grandisons," she said, "are two too many!" And indeed the History of Sir Charles Grandison had its place in the small library free to them from childhood; but Christina knew nothing of him except by hearsay.

The young men had been brought up in a solemn school—had learned to take

life as a serious and lovely and imperative thing. Not the less, upon occasions of merry-making, would they frolic like young colts even yet, and that without the least reaction or sense of folly afterwards. At the same time, although Ian had in the village from childhood the character, especially in the workshops of the carpenter, weaver, and shoemaker, of being full of humour, he was in himself always rather sad, being perplexed with many things: his humour was but the foam of his troubled sea.

Christina was annoyed besides that Mercy seemed not indifferent to the opinion of the men. It was from pure inexperience of the man-world, she said to herself, that the silly child could see anything interesting in them! *Gentlemen* she must allow them —but of such an old-fashioned type as to be gentlemen but by courtesy—not gentlemen in the world's count! She was of the world; they of the north of Scotland! All day Mercy had been on their side and

against her! It might be from sheer perversity, but she had never been like that before! She must take care she did not make a fool of herself! It might end in some unhappiness to the young goose! Assuredly neither her father nor mother would countenance the thing! She must throw herself into the breach! But which of them was she taking a fancy to?

She was not so anxious about her sister, however, as piqued that she had not herself gathered one expression of homage, surprised one look of admiration, seen one sign of incipient worship in either. Of the two she liked better the ploughman! The other was more a man of the world—but he was not of her world! With him she was a stranger in a very strange land!

Christina's world was a very small one, and in its temple stood her own image. Ian belonged to the universe. He was a gentleman of the high court. Wherever he might go throughout God's worlds, he would be at home. How could there be

much attraction between Christina and him?

Alister was more talkative on the way back than he had been all day. Christina thought the change caused by having them, or rather her, to himself alone; but in reality it sprang from the prospect of soon rejoining his brother without them. Some of the things he said, Mercy found well worth hearing; and an old Scotch ballad which he repeated, having learned it of a lowland nurse, appeared to her as beautiful as it was wild and strange. For Christina, she despised the Scotch language: it was vulgar! Had Alister informed her that Beowulf, "the most important of all the relics of the Pagan Anglo-Saxon, is written in undeniable Scotch, the English of the period," it would have made no difference to Christina! Why should it? She had never yet cared for any book beyond the novels of a certain lady which, to speak with due restraint, do not tend to profitable thought. At the same time, it was not for

the worst in them that she liked them; she did not understand them well enough to see it. But there was ground to fear that, when she came to understand, shocked at first, she would speedily get accustomed to it, and at length like them all the better for it.

In Mercy's unawakened soul, echoed now and then a faint thrill of response to some of the things Alister said, and, oftener, to some of the verses he repeated; and she would look up at him when he was silent, with an unconscious seeking glance, as if dimly aware of a beneficent presence. Alister was drawn by the honest gaze of her yet undeveloped and homely countenance, with its child-look in process of sublimation, whence the woman would glance out and vanish again, leaving the child to give disappointing answers. There was something in it of the look a dog casts up out of his beautiful brown eyes into the mystery of his master's countenance. She was on the edge of coming awake; all was

darkness about her, but something was pulling at her! She had never known before that a lady might be lovely in a ballad as well as in a beautiful gown!

Finding himself so listened to, though the listener was little more than a child, the heart of the chief began to swell in his great bosom. Like a child he was pleased. The gray day about him grew sweet; its very grayness was sweet, and of a silvery sheen. When they arrived at the burn, and, easily enough from that side, he had handed them across, he was not quite so glad to turn from them as he had expected to be.

"Are you going?" said Christina with genuine surprise, for she had not understood his intention.

"The way is easy now," he answered. "I am sorry to leave you, but I have to join Ian, and the twilight will be flickering down before I reach the place."

"And there will be no moon!" said Mercy: "how will you get home through the darkness?"

"We do not mean to come home to-night."

"Oh, then, you are going to friends!"

"No; we shall be with each other—not a soul besides."

"There can't surely be a hotel up there?"

Alister laughed as he answered,

"There are more ways than one of spending a night on the hills. If you look from a window—in that direction," he said, pointing, "the last thing before you go to bed, you will see that at least we shall not perish with cold."

He sprang again over the burn, and with a wave of his bonnet, went, like Ian, straight up the hill.

The girls stood for some time watching him climb as if he had been going up a flight of stairs, until he stood clear against the sky, when, with another wave of his bonnet, he too disappeared.

Mercy did not forget to look from her window in the direction Alister had indicated. There was no room to mistake

what he meant, for through the dark ran a great opening to the side of a hill somewhere in the night, where glowed and flamed, reddening the air, a huge crescent of fire, slowly climbing, like a column of attack, up toward the invisible crest.

"What does it mean?" she said to herself. "Why do they make such a bonfire —with nobody but themselves to enjoy it? What strange men—out by themselves in the dark night, on the cold hill! What can they be doing it for? I hope they have something to eat! I *should* like to hear them talk! I wonder what they are saying about *us!* I am certain we bored them!"

The brothers did speak of them, and readily agreed in some notion of their characters; but they soon turned to other things, and there passed a good deal that Mercy could not have followed. What would she, for instance, have made of Alister's challenge to his brother to explain the metaphysical necessity for the sine,

tangent, and secant of an angle belonging to its supplement as well?

When the ladies overtook them in the morning, Alister was reading, from an old manuscript volume of his brother's which he had found in a chest, a certain very early attempt at humour, and now they disputed concerning it as they watched the fire. It had abundance of faults, and in especial lacked suture, but will serve to show something of Ian's youthful *ingenium*.

TO A VAGRANT.

Gentle vagrant, stumping over
Several verdant fields of clover!
Subject of unnumbered knockings!
Tattered coat and ragged stockings,
Slouching hat and roving eye,
Tell of *settled* vagrancy!
  Wretched wanderer, can it be
The poor laws have leaguered thee?
Hear'st thou, in thy thorny den,
Tramp of rural policemen,
Inly fancying, in thy rear
Coats of blue and buttons clear,
While to meet thee, in the van
Stalks some vengeful alderman?—
Each separate sense bringing a notion
Of forms that teach thee locomotion!

Beat and battered altogether,
By fellow-men, by wind and weather;
Hounded on through fens and bogs,
Chased by men and bit by dogs:
And, in thy weakly way of judging,
So kindly taught the art of trudging;
Or, with a moment's happier lot,
Pitied, pensioned, and forgot—
Cutty-pipe thy *regium donum;*
Poverty thy *summum bonum;*
Thy frigid couch a sandstone stratum;
A colder grave thy ultimatum;
Circumventing, circumvented;
In short, excessively tormented,
Everything combines to scare
Charity's dear pensioner!
—Say, vagrant, can'st thou grant to me
A slice of thy philosophy?
Haply, in thy many trudgings,
Having found unchallenged lodgings,
Thy thoughts, unused to saddle-crupper,
Ambling no farther than thy supper—
Thou, by the light of heaven-lit taper,
Mendest thy prospective paper!
Then, jolly pauper, stitch till day;
Let not thy roses drop away,
Lest, begrimed with muddy matter,
Thy body peep from every tatter,
And men—a charitable dose—
Should physic thee with food and clothes!
Nursling of adversity!
'Tis thy glory thus to be
Sinking fund of raggery!

Thus to scrape a nation's dishes,
And fatten on a few good wishes!
Or, on some venial treason bent,
Frame thyself a government,
For thy crest a brimless hat,
Poverty's aristocrat!
Nonne habeam te tristem,
Planet of the human system?
Comet lank and melancholic
—Orbit shocking parabolic—
Seen for a little in the sky
Of the world of sympathy—
Seldom failing when predicted,
Coming most when most restricted,
Dragging a nebulous tail with thee
Of hypothetic vagrancy—
Of vagrants large, and vagrants small,
Vagrants scarce visible at all!
Matchless oracle of woe!
Anarchy in embryo!
Strange antipodes of bliss!
Parody on happiness!
Raghouse of the great creation!
Subject meet for strangulation,
By practice tutored to condense
The cautious inquiry for pence,
And skilful, with averted eye,
To hide thy latent roguery—
Lo, on thy hopes I clap a stopper!
Vagrant, thou shalt have no copper!
Gather thy stumps, and get thee hence,
Unwise solicitor of pence!

Alister, who all but worshipped Ian, and cherished every scrap from his pen, had not until quite lately seen this foolish production, as Ian counted it, and was delighted with it, as he would have been had it been much worse. Ian was vexed that he should like it, and now spent the greater part of an hour trying to show him how very bad in parts, even senseless it was. Profusion of epithets without applicability, want of continuity, purposelessness, silliness, heartlessness—were but a few of his denunciations. Alister argued it was but a bit of fun, and that anybody that knew Ian, knew perfectly he would never amuse himself with a fellow without giving him something, but it was in vain; Ian was bent on showing it altogether unworthy. So, not to waste the night, they dropped the dispute, and by the light of the blazing heather, turned to a chapter of Boethius.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WOLVES.

My readers may remember that Ian was on the point of acquainting his mother with an important event in his spiritual history, when they were interrupted by the involuntary call of the girls from the New House. The mother, as will readily be believed, remained desirous of listening to her son's story, though dreading it would not be of a kind to give her much satisfaction; but partly from preventions—favoured, it must be confessed by Ian, and yet more from direct avoidance on his part, the days passed without her hearing anything more of it. Ian had in truth almost repented his offer of the narrative: a certain vague assurance that it would not be satisfactory to her, had

grown upon him until he felt it unkind to lay before her an experience whose narration would seem to ask a sympathy she could not give. But the mother was unable to let the thing rest. More than by interest she was urged by anxiety. In spite of her ungod-like theories of God, it was impossible she could be in despair about her noble Ian; still, her hope was at best founded on the uncovenanted mercies of God, not on the security of his bond! She did not believe that God was doing and would do his best for every man; therefore she had no assurance that he would bring down the pride of Ian, and compel his acceptance of terms worthy of an old Roman father, half law-circumventing lawyer, half heartless tyrant. But her longing to hear what her son had proposed telling her, was chiefly inspired by the hope of getting nearer to him, of closer sympathy becoming possible between them through her learning more clearly what his views were. She constantly felt as if walking along the side of a thick hedge,

with occasional thinnesses through which now and then she gained a ghostly glimpse of her heart's treasure gliding along the other side—close to her, yet so far that, when they spoke, they seemed calling across a gulf of dividing darkness. Therefore, the night after that spent by her sons on the hill, all having retired some two hours before, the mother, finding herself unable to sleep, rose as she had often done ere now, and stole to the door of the little room under the thatch where Ian lay. Listening, and judging him awake, she went softly in, and sat down by his bedside.

There had been such occasions on which, though son as well as mother was wide awake, neither spoke a word; but this time the mother could not be silent.

"You never told me, Ian, the story you began about something that made you pray!"

Ian saw he could not now draw back without causing her more trouble than would the narration.

"Are you sure you will not take cold, mother dear?" he said.

"I am warmly clad, my son; and my heart, more than I can tell you, is longing to hear all about it."

"I am afraid you will not find my story so interesting as you expect, mother!"

"What concerns you is more interesting to me than anything else in the whole world, Ian."

"Not more than God, mother?" said Ian.

The mother was silent. She was as honest as her sons. The question, dimlucent, showed her, if but in shadow, something of the truth concerning herself—not so that she could grasp it, for she saw it as in a glimmer, a fluctuating, vanishing flash—namely, that she cared more about salvation than about God—that, if she could but keep her boy out of hell, she would be content to live on without any nearer approach to him in whom she had her being! God was to her an awe, not a ceaseless, growing delight!

There are centuries of paganism yet in many lovely Christian souls—paganism so deep, therefore so little recognized, that their earnest endeavour is to plant that paganism ineradicably in the hearts of those dearest to them.

As she did not answer, Ian was afraid she was hurt, and thought it better to begin his story at once.

"It was one night in the middle of winter—last winter, near Moscow," he began, "and the frost was very bitter—the worst night for cold I have ever known. I had gone with a companion into the depth of a great pine forest. On our way, the cold grew so intense, that we took refuge at a little public-house, frequented by peasants and persons of the lowest ranks. On entering I saw a scene which surpassed all for interest I had ever before witnessed. The little lonely house was crammed with Russian soldiers, fierce-looking fellows, and I daresay their number formed our protection from violence. Many of them were

among the finest looking fellows I have ever seen. They were half drunk, and were dancing and singing with the wildest gesticulations and grimaces; but such singing for strange wildness and harmony combined I had never before listened to. One would keep up a solo for some minutes, when the whole company would join in a sort of chorus, dancing frantically about, but with the most perfect regularity of movement. One of them came up to me and with a low bow begged me in the name of the rest to give them some money. I accordingly gave them a silver ruble, upon which the whole party set up a shout, surrounded me, and in a moment a score of brawny fellows had lifted me in the air, where I was borne along in triumph. I took off my cap and gave three hip-hip-hurrahs as loud as my lungs could bawl, whereupon, with the profoundest expressions of gratitude, I was lowered from my elevation. One of them then who seemed to be the spokesman of the rest, seized me

in his arms and gave me a hearty kiss on the cheek, on which I took my departure amid universal acclamation.—But all that's not worth telling you about; it was not for that I began—only the scene came up so clear before me that it drew me aside."

"I don't need to tell you, Ian," said his mother, with shining eyes, "that if it were only what you had to eat on the most ordinary day of your life, it would be interesting to me!"

"Thank you, mother dear; I seem to know that without being told; but I could never talk to you about anything that was not interesting to myself."

Here he paused. He would rather have stopped.

"Go on, go on, Ian. I am longing to hear."

"Well—where was I?—We left at the inn our carriage and horses, and went with our guns far into the forest—all of straight, tall pines, up and up; and the little island-like tops of them, which, if there be a

breath of wind, are sure to be swaying about like the motion of a dream, were as still as the big frosty stars in the deep blue overhead."

"What did you want in such a lonely place at that time of the night?" asked the mother.

She sat with firm-closed lips, and wide, night-filled eyes looking at her son, the fear of love in her beautiful face—a face more beautiful than any other that son had yet seen, fit window for a heart so full of refuge to look out of; and he knew how she looked though the darkness was between them.

"Wolves, mother," he answered.

She shuddered. She was a great reader in the long winter nights, and had read terrible stories of wolves—the last of which in Scotland had been killed not far from where they sat.

"What did you want with the wolves, Ian?" she faltered.

"To kill them, mother. I never liked killing animals any more than Alister; but

even he destroys the hooded crow; and wolves are yet fairer game. They are the out-of-door devils of that country, and I fancy devils do go into them sometimes, as they did once into the poor swine: they are the terror of all who live near the forests.

"There was no moon—only star-light; but whenever we came to any opener space, there was light enough from the snow to see all about; there was light indeed from the snow all through the forest, but the trees were thick and dark. Far away, somewhere in the mystery of the black wood, we could now and then hear a faint howling: it came from the red throats of the wolves."

"You are frightening me, Ian!" said the mother, as if they had been two children telling each other tales.

"Indeed, mother, they are very horrible when they hunt in droves, ravenous with hunger. To kill one of them, if it be but one, is to do something for your kind. And just at that time I was oppressed with the

feeling that I had done and was doing nothing for my people—my own humans; and not knowing anything else I could at the moment attempt, I resolved to go and kill a wolf or two: they had killed a poor woman only two nights before.

"As soon as we could after hearing the noise of them, we got up into two trees. It took us some time to discover two that were fit for our purpose, and we did not get them so near each other as we should have liked. It was rather anxious work too until we found them, for if we encountered on foot a pack of those demons, we could be but a moment or two alive: killing one, ten would be upon us, and a hundred more on the backs of those. But we hoped they would smell us up in the trees, and search for us, when we should be able to give account of a few of them at least: we had double-barrelled guns, and plenty of powder and ball."

"But how could you endure the cold—at night—and without food?"

"No, mother; we did not try that! We had plenty to eat in our pockets. My companion had a bottle of vodki, and——"

"What is that?" asked the mother with suspicion.

"A sort of raw spirit—horrible stuff—more like spirits of wine. They say it does not hurt in such cold."

"But, Ian!" cried the mother, and seemed unable to say more.

"Don't be frightened, mother!" said Ian, with a merry laugh. "Surely you do not imagine *I* would drink such stuff! True, I had my bottle, but it was full of tea. The Russians drink enormous quantities of tea—though not so strong as you make it."

"Go on, then, Ian; go on."

"We sat a long time, and there was no sign of the wolves coming near us. It was very cold, but our furs kept in our warmth. By and by I fell asleep—which was not dangerous so long as I kept warm, and I thought the cold must wake me before it

began to numb me. And as I slept I dreamed; but my dream did not change the place; the forest, the tree I was in, all my surroundings were the same. I even dreamed that I came awake, and saw everything about me just as it was. I seemed to open my eyes, and look about me on the dazzling snow from my perch: I was in a small tree on the border of a little clearing.

"Suddenly, out of the wood to my left, issued something, running fast, but with soundless feet, over the snow. I doubted in my dream whether the object were a live thing or only a shadow. It came nearer, and I saw it was a child, a little girl, running as if for her life. She came straight to the tree I sat in, and when close to it, but without a moment's halt, looked up, and I saw a sweet little face, white with terror—which somehow seemed, however, not for herself, but for me. I called out after her to stop, and I would take her into the tree beside me, where the wolves could not reach her; but

she only shook her head, and ran on over the clearing into the forest. Among the boles I watched the fleeting shape appear and disappear and appear again, until I saw it no more. Then first I heard another kind of howl from the wolves—that of pursuit. It strengthened and swelled, growing nearer and nearer, till at last, through the stillness of the night and the moveless forest and the dead snow, came to my ear a kind of soft rushing sound. I don't know how to describe it. The rustle of dry leaves is too sharp; it was like a very soft heavy rain on a window—a small dull padding padding: it was the feet of the wolves. They came nearer and grew louder and louder, but the noise was still muffled and soft. Their howling, however, was now loud and horrid. I suppose they cannot help howling; if they could, they would have too much power over poor creatures, coming upon them altogether at unawares; but as it is, they tell, whether they will or no, that they are upon the way.

At length, dark as a torrent of pitch, out of the forest flowed a multitude of obscure things, and streamed away, black over the snow, in the direction the child had taken. They passed close to the foot of my tree, but did not even look up, flitting by like a shadow whose substance was unseen. Where the child had vanished they also disappeared: plainly they were after her!

"It was only a dream, mother! don't be so frightened," interrupted Ian, for here his mother gave a little cry, almost forgetting what the narration was.

"Then first," he went on, "I seemed to recover my self-possession. I saw that, though I must certainly be devoured by the wolves, and the child could not escape, I had no choice but go down and follow, do what I could, and die with her. Down I was the same instant, running as I had never run before even in a dream, along the track of the wolves. As I ran, I heard their howling, but it seemed so far off that I could not hope to be in time to kill one of

them ere they were upon her. Still, by their howling, it did not appear they had reached her, and I ran on. Their noise grew louder and louder, but I seemed to run miles and miles, wondering what spell was upon me that I could not come up with them. All at once the clamour grew hideous, and I saw them. They were gathered round a tree, in a clearing just like that I had left, and were madly leaping against it, but ever falling back baffled. I looked up: in the top of the tree sat the little girl, her white face looking down upon them with a smile. All the terror had vanished from it. It was still white as the snow, but like the snow was radiating a white light through the dark foliage of the fir. I see it often, mother, so clear that I could paint it. I was enchanted at the sight. But she was not in safety yet, and I rushed into the heap of wolves, striking and stabbing with my hunting-knife. I got to the tree, and was by her in a moment. But as I took the child in my

arms I woke, and knew that it was a dream. I sat in my own tree, and up against the stem of it broke a howling, surging black wave of wolves. They leaped at the tree-bole as a rock-checked billow would leap. My gun was to my shoulder in a moment, and blazed among them. Howls of death arose. Their companions fell upon the wounded, and ate them up. The tearing and yelling at the foot of the tree was like the tumult of devils full of hate and malice and greed. Then for the first time I thought whether such creatures might not be the open haunts of demons. I do not imagine that, when those our Lord drove out of the man asked permission to go into the swine, they desired anything unheard of before in the demon-world. I think they were not in the way of going into tame animals; but, as they must go out of the man, as they greatly dreaded the abyss of the disembodied, and as no ferocious animals fit to harbour them were near, they begged leave to go into such as were accessible, though

unsuitable; whereupon the natural consequence followed: their presence made the poor swine miserable even to madness, and with the instinct of so many maniacs that in death alone lies their deliverance, they rushed straight into the loch."

"It may be so, Ian! But I want to hear how you got away from the wolves."

"I fired and fired; and still they kept rushing on the tree-bole, heaping themselves against it, those behind struggling up on the backs of those next it, in a storm of rage and hunger and jealousy. Not a few who had just helped to eat some of their fellows, were themselves eaten in turn, and not a scrap of them left; but it was a large pack, and it would have taken a long time to kill enow to satisfy those that remained. I killed and killed until my ammunition was gone, and then there was nothing for it but await the light. When the morning began to dawn, they answered its light with silence, and turning away swept like a shadow back into the wood. Strange to

tell, I heard afterwards that a child had been killed by them in the earlier part of that same night. But even now sometimes, as I lie awake, I grow almost doubtful whether the whole was not a hideous dream.

"Not the less for that was what I went through between the time my powder came to an end and the dawn of the morning, a real spiritual fact.

"In the midst of the howling I grew so sleepy that the horrible noise itself seemed to lull me while it kept me awake, and I fell into a kind of reverie with which my dream came back and mingled. I seemed to be sitting in the tree with the little shining girl, and she was my own soul; and all the wrong things I had in me, and all the wrong things I had done, with all the weaknesses and evil tendencies of my nature, whether mine by fault or by inheritance, had taken shape, and, in the persons of the howling wolves below, were besieging me, to get at me, and devour me. Suddenly my soul was gone. Above were the still,

bright stars, shining unmoved; beneath was the white, betraying snow, and the howling wolves; away through the forest was fleeting, ever fleeting, my poor soul, in the likeness of a white-faced child! All at once came a great stillness, as of a desert place, where breathed nor life of man nor life of beast. I was alone, frightfully alone —alone as I had never been before. The creatures at the foot of the tree were still howling, but their cry sounded far away and small; they were in some story I had been reading, not anywhere in my life! I was left and lost—left by whom?—lost by whom?—in the waste of my own being, without stay or comfort. I looked up to the sky; it was infinite—yet only a part of myself, and much too near to afford me any refuge from the desert of my lost self. It came down nearer; the limitless space came down, and clasped me, and held me. It came close to me—as if I had been a shape off which all nature was taking a mould. I was at once everything and nothing. I

cannot tell you how frightful it was! In agony I cried to God, with a cry of utter despair. I cannot say whether I may believe that he answered me; I know this, that a great quiet fell upon me—but a quiet as of utter defeat and helplessness. Then again, I cannot tell how, the quiet and the helplessness melted away into a sense of God—a feeling as if great space all about me was God and not emptiness. Wolf nor sin could touch me! I was a wide peace—my very being peace! And in my mind—whether an echo from the Bible, I do not know—were the words:—'I, even I, am he that comforteth thee. I am God, thy saviour!' Whereas I had seemed all alone, I was with God, the only *with*ness man can really share! I lifted my eyes; morning was in the east, and the wolves were slinking away over the snow."

How to receive the strange experience the mother did not know. She ought to say something, for she sorely questioned it! Not a word had he spoken belonging to the

religion in which she had brought him up, except two — *sin* and *God!* There was nothing in it about the atonement! She did not see that it was a dream, say rather a vision, of the atonement itself. To Ian her interpretation of the atonement seemed an everlasting and hopeless severance. The patience of God must surely be far more tried by those who would interpret him, than by those who deny him: the latter speak lies against him, the former speak lies for him! Yet all the time the mother felt as in the presence of some creature of a higher world—one above the ordinary race of men—whom the powers of evil had indeed misled, but perhaps not finally snared. She little thought how near she was to imagining that good may come out of evil—that there is good which is not of God! She did not yet understand that salvation lies in being one with Christ, even as the branch is one with the vine;—that any salvation short of knowing God is no salvation at all. What moment a man feels that he belongs

to God utterly, the atonement is there, the son of God is reaping his harvest.

The good mother was not, however, one of those conceited, stiff-necked, power-loving souls who have been the curse and ruin of the church in all ages; she was but one of those in whom reverence for its passing form dulls the perception of unchangeable truth. They shut up God's precious light in the horn lantern of human theory, and the lantern casts such shadows on the path to the kingdom as seem to dim eyes insurmountable obstructions. For the sake of what they count revealed, they refuse all further revelation, and what satisfies them is merest famine to the next generation of the children of the kingdom. Instead of God's truth they offer man's theory, and accuse of rebellion against God such as cannot live on the husks they call food. But ah, home-hungry soul! thy God is not the elder brother of the parable, but the father with the best robe and the ring —a God high above all thy longing, even as the heavens are high above the earth.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GULF THAT DIVIDED.

When Ian ceased, a silence deep as the darkness around, fell upon them. To Ian, the silence seemed the very voice of God, clear in the darkness; to the mother it was a darkness interpenetrating the darkness; it was a great gulf between her and her boy. She must cry to him aloud, but what should she cry? If she did not, an opportunity, perhaps the last, on which hung eternal issues, would be gone for ever! Each moment's delay was a disobedience to her conscience, a yielding to love's sinful reluctance! With "sick assay" she heaved at the weight on her heart, but not a word would come. If Ian would but speak again,

and break the spell of the terrible stillness! She must die in eternal wrong if she did not speak! But no word would come. Something in her would not move. It was not in her brain or her lips or her tongue, for she knew all the time she could speak if she would. The caitiff will was not all on the side of duty! She was not *for* the truth! —could she then be *of* the truth? She did not suspect a divine reluctance to urge that which was not good.

Not always when the will works may we lay hold of it in the act: somehow, she knew not how, she heard herself speaking.

"Are you sure it was God, Ian?" she said.

The voice she heard was weak and broken, reedy and strained, like the voice of one all but dead.

"No, mother," answered Ian, "but I hope it was."

"Hopes, my dear boy, are not to be trusted."

"That is true, mother; and yet we are saved by hope."

"We are saved by *faith*."

"I do not doubt it."

"You rejoice my heart. But faith in what?"

"Faith in God, mother."

"That will not save you."

"No, but God will."

"The devils believe in God, and tremble."

"I believe in the father of Jesus Christ, and do not tremble."

"You ought to tremble before an unreconciled God."

"Like the devils, mother?"

"Like a sinful child of Adam. Whatever your fancies, Ian, God will not hear you, except you pray to him in the name of his Son."

"Mother, would you take my God from me? Would you blot him out of the deeps of the universe?"

"Ian! are you mad? What frightful things you would lay to my charge!"

"Mother, I would gladly—oh how gladly! perish for ever, to save God from being the

kind of God you would have me believe him. I love God, and will not think him other than good. Rather than believe he does not hear every creature that cries to him, whether he knows Jesus Christ or not, I would believe there was no God, and go mourning to my grave."

"That is not the doctrine of the gospel."

"It is, mother: Jesus himself says, 'Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.'"

"Why then do you not come to him, Ian?"

"I do come to him; I come to him every day. I believe in nobody but him. He only makes the universe worth being, or any life worth living!"

"Ian, I can *not* understand you! If you believe like that about him,——"

"I don't believe *about* him, mother! I believe *in* him. He is my life."

"We will not dispute about words! The question is, do you place your faith for salvation in the sufferings of Christ for you?"

"I do not, mother. My faith is in Jesus himself, not in his sufferings."

"Then the anger of God is not turned away from you."

"Mother, I say again—I love God, and will not believe such things of him as you say. I love him so that I would rather lose him than believe so of him."

"Then you do not accept the Bible as your guide?"

"I do, mother, for it tells me of Jesus Christ. There is no such teaching as you say in the Bible."

"How little you know your New Testament!"

"I don't know my New Testament! It is the only book I do know! I read it constantly! It is the only thing I could not live without!—No, I do not mean that! I *could* do without my Testament! Christ would *be* all the same!"

"Oh, Ian! Ian! and yet you will not give Christ the glory of satisfying divine justice by his suffering for your sins!"

"Mother, to say that the justice of God is satisfied with suffering, is a piece of the darkness of hell. God is willing to suffer, and ready to inflict suffering to save from sin, but no suffering is satisfaction to him or his justice."

"What do you mean by his justice then?"

"That he gives you and me and everybody fair play."

The homeliness of the phrase offended the moral ear of the mother.

"How dare you speak lightly of *him* in my hearing!" she cried.

"Because I will speak for God even to the face of my mother!" answered Ian. "He is more to me than you, mother—ten times more."

"You speak against God, Ian," she rejoined, calmed by the feeling she had roused.

"No, mother. He speaks against God who says he does things that are not good. It does not make a thing good to call it

good. I speak *for* him when I say he cannot but give fair play. He knows he put me where I was sure to sin; he will not condemn me because I have sinned; he leaves me to do that myself. He will condemn me only if I do not turn away from sin, for he has made me able to turn from it, and I do."

"He will forgive sin only for Christ's sake."

"He forgives it for his own name's sake, his own love's sake. There is no such word as *for Christ's sake* in the New Testament —except where Paul prays us for Christ's sake to be reconciled to God. It is in the English New Testament, but not in the Greek."

"Then you do not believe that the justice of God demands the satisfaction of the sinner's endless punishment?"

"I do not. Nothing can satisfy the justice of God but justice in his creature. The justice of God is the love of what is right, and the doing of what is right.

Eternal misery in the name of justice could satisfy none but a demon whose bad laws had been broken."

"I grant you that no amount of suffering on the part of the wicked could *satisfy* justice; but it is the Holy One who suffers for our sins!"

"Oh, mother! *Justice* do wrong for its own satisfaction! Did Jesus *deserve* punishment? If not, then to punish him was to wrong him!"

"But he was willing; he consented."

"He yielded to injustice—but the injustice was man's, not God's. If Justice insisted on punishent, it would at least insist on the guilty, not the innocent, being punished! it would revolt from the idea of the innocent being punished for the guilty! Mind, I say *being punished*, not *suffering:* that is another thing altogether. It is an eternal satisfaction to love to suffer for the guilty, but not to justice that innocence should be punished for the guilty. The whole idea of such atonement is the merest

subterfuge, a figment of the paltry human intellect to reconcile difficulties of its own invention. Once, when Alister had done something wrong, my father said, 'He must be punished—except some one will be punished for him!' I offered to take his place, partly that it seemed expected of me, partly that I was moved by vanity, and partly that I foresaw what would follow."

"And what did follow?" asked the mother, to whom the least word out of the past concerning her husband, was like news from the world beyond. At the same time it seemed almost an offence that one of his sons should know anything about him she did not know.

"He scarcely touched me, mother," answered Ian. "The thing taught me something very different from what he had meant to teach by it. That he failed to carry out his idea of justice helped me afterwards to see that God could not have done it either, for that it was not justice. Some perception of this must have lain at

the root of the heresy that Jesus did not suffer, but a cloud-phantom took his place on the cross. Wherever people speculate instead of obeying, they fall into endless error."

"You graceless boy! Do you dare to say your father speculated instead of obeying?" cried the mother, hot with indignation.

"No, mother. It was not my father who invented that way of accounting for the death of our Lord."

"He believed it!"

"He accepted it, saturated with the tradition of the elders before he could think for himself. He does not believe it now."

"But why then should Christ have suffered?"

"It is the one fact that explains to me everything," said Ian. "—But I am not going to talk about it. So long as your theory satisfies you, mother, why should I show you mine? When it no longer satisfies you, when it troubles you as it has troubled me, and as I pray God it may trouble you,

when you feel it stand between you and the best love you could give God, then I will share my very soul with you—tell you thoughts which seem to sublimate my very being in adoration."

"I do not see what other meaning you can put upon the statement that he was a sacrifice for our sins."

"Had we not sinned he would never have died; and he died to deliver us from our sins. He against whom was the sin, became the sacrifice for it; the Father suffered in the Son, for they are one. But if I could see no other explanation than yours, I would not, could not accept it—for God's sake I would not."

"How can you say you believe in Christ, when you do not believe in the atonement!"

"It is not so, mother. I do not believe what you mean by the atonement; what God means by it, I desire to accept. But we are never told to believe in the atonement; we are told to believe in Christ—

and, mother, in the name of the great Father who hears me speak, I do believe in him."

"How can you, when you do not believe what God says about him?"

"I do. God does not say those things about him you think he says. They are mere traditions, not the teaching of those who understood him. But I might believe all about him quite correctly, and yet not believe in him."

"What do you call believing in him, then?"

"Obeying him, mother—to say it as shortly as I can. I try to obey him in the smallest things he says—only there are no small things he says—and so does Alister. I strive to be what he would have me, nor do I hold anything else worth my care. Let a man trust in his atonement to absolute assurance, if he does not do the things he tells him—the very things he said—he does not believe in him. He may be a good man, but he has not yet heard enough

and learned enough of the Father to be sent to Jesus to learn more."

"Then I do not believe in him," said the mother, with a strange, sad gentleness—for his words awoke an old anxiety never quite at rest.

Ian was silent. The darkness seemed to deepen around them, and the silence grew keen. The mother began to tremble.

"*God knows*," said Ian at length, and again the broken silence closed around them.

It was between God and his mother now! Unwise counsellors will persuade the half crazy doubter in his own faith, to believe that he does believe!—how much better to convince him that his faith is a poor thing, that he must rise and go and do the thing that Jesus tells him, and so believe indeed! When will men understand that it is neither thought nor talk, neither sorrow for sin nor love of holiness that is required of them, but obedience! To *be* and to *obey* are one.

A cold hand grasping her heart, the

mother rose, and went from the room. The gulf seemed now at last utterly, hopelessly impassable! She had only feared it before; she knew it now! She did not see that, while she believed evil things of God, and none the less that she called them good, oneness was impossible between her and any being in God's creation.

The poor mother thought herself broken-hearted, and lay down too sick to know that she was trembling from head to foot. Such was the hold, such the authority of traditional human dogma on her soul—a soul that scorned the notion of priestly interposition between God and his creature—that, instead of glorifying God that she had given birth to such a man, she wept bitterly because he was on the broad road to eternal condemnation.

But as she lay, now weeping, now still and cold with despair, she found that for some time she had not been thinking. But she had not been asleep! Whence then was this quiet that was upon her? Something

had happened, though she knew of nothing! There was in her as it were a moonlight of peace!

"Can it be God?" she said to herself.

No more than Ian could she tell whether it was God or not; but from that night she had an idea in her soul by which to reach after "the peace of God." She lifted up her heart in such prayer as she had never prayed before; and slowly, imperceptibly awoke in her the feeling that, if she was not believing aright, God would not therefore cast her off, but would help her to believe as she ought to believe: was she not willing? Therewith she began to feel as if the gulf betwixt her and Ian were not so wide as she had supposed; and that if it were, she would yet hope in the Son of Man. Doubtless he was in rebellion against God, seeing he would question his ways, and refuse to believe the word he had spoken, but surely something might be done for him! The possibility had not yet dawned upon her that there could be any-

thing in the New Testament but those doctrines against which the best in him revolted. She little suspected the glory of sky and earth and sea eternal that would one day burst upon her! that she would one day see God not only good but infinitely good—infinitely better than she had dared to think him, fearing to image him better than he was! Mortal, she dreaded being more just than God, more pure than her maker!

"I will go away to-morrow!" said Ian to himself. "I am only a pain to her. She will come to see things better without me! I cannot live in her sight any longer now! I will go, and come again."

His heart broke forth in prayer.

"O God, let my mother see that thou art indeed true-hearted; that thou dost not give us life by parings and subterfuges, but abundantly; that thou dost not make men in order to assert thy dominion over them, but that they may partake of thy life. O God, have pity when I cannot understand,

and teach me as thou wouldst the little one whom, if thou wert an earthly father amongst us as thy son was an earthly son, thou wouldst carry about in thy arms. When pride rises in me, and I feel as if I ought to be free and walk without thy hand; when it looks as if a man should be great in himself, nor need help from God; then think thou of me, and I shall know that I cannot live or think without the self-willing life; that thou art because thou art, I am because thou art; that I am deeper in thee than my life, thou more to my being than that being to itself. Was not that Satan's temptation, Father? Did he not take self for the root of self in him, when God only is the root of all self? And he has not repented yet! Is it his thought coming up in me, flung from the hollow darkness of his soul into mine? Thou knowest, when it comes I am wretched. I love it not. I would have thee lord and love over all. But I cannot understand: how comes it to look sometimes as if inde-

pendence must be the greater? A lie cannot be greater than the truth! I do not understand, but thou dost. I cannot see my foundations; I cannot dig up the roots of my being: that would be to understand creation! Will the Adversary ever come to see that thou only art grand and beautiful? How came he to think to be greater by setting up for himself? How was it that it looked so to him? How is it that, not being true, it should ever look so? There must be an independence that thou lovest, of which this temptation is the shadow! That must be how Satan fell!—for the sake of not being a slave!—that he might be a free being! Ah, Lord, I see how it all comes! It is because we are not near enough to thee to partake of thy liberty that we want a liberty of our own different from thine! We do not see that we are one with thee, that thy glory is our glory, that we can have none but in thee! that we are of thy family, thy home, thy heart, and what is great for thee is great for us!

that man's meanness is to want to be great out of his Father! Without thy eternity in us we are so small that we think ourselves great, and are thus miserably abject and contemptible. Thou only art true! thou only art noble! thou wantest no glory for selfishness! thou doest, thou art, what thou requirest of thy children! I know it, for I see it in Jesus, who casts the contempt of obedience upon the baseness of pride, who cares only for thee and for us, never thinking of himself save as a gift to give us! O lovely, perfect Christ! with my very life I worship thee! Oh, pray, Christ! make me and my brother strong to be the very thing thou wouldst have us, as thy brothers, the children of thy Father. Thou art our perfect brother —perfect in love, in courage, in tenderness! Amen, Lord! Good-night! I am thine."

He was silent for a few moments, then resumed:

"Lord, thou knowest whither my thoughts turn the moment I cease praying to thee.

I dared not think of her, but that I know thee. But for thee, my heart would be as water within me! Oh, take care of her, come near to her! Thou didst send her where she could not learn fast—but she did learn. And now, God, I do not know where she is! Thou only of all in this world knowest, for to thee she lives though gone from my sight and knowledge—in the dark to me. Pray, Father, let her know that thou art near her, and that I love her. Thou hast made me love her by taking her from me: thou wilt give her to me again! In this hope I will live all my days, until thou takest me also; for to hope mightily is to believe well in thee. I will hope in thee infinitely. Amen, Father!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CLAN CHRISTMAS.

By slow degrees, with infinite subdivisions and apparent reversals of change, the autumn had passed into winter indeed. Cloud above, mire below, mist and rain all between, made up many days; only, like the dreariest life, they were broken through and parted, lest they should seem the universe itself, by such heavenly manifestations, such gleams and glimpses of better, as come into all lives, all winters, all evil weathers. What is loosed on earth is loosed first in heaven: we have often shared of heaven, when we thought it but a softening of earth's hardness. Every relief is a promise, a pledge as well as a passing meal. The frost at length had brought with it

brightness and persuasion and rousing. In the fields it was swelling and breaking the clods; and for the heart of man, it did something to break up that clod too. A sense of friendly pleasure filled all the human creatures. The children ran about like wild things; the air seemed to intoxicate them. The mother went out walking with the girls, and they talked of their father and Christian and Mr. Sercombe, who were all coming together. For some time they saw nothing of their next neighbours.

They had made some attempts at acquaintance with the people of the glen, but unhappily were nowise courteous enough for their ideas of good breeding, and offended both their pride and their sense of propriety. The manners and address of these northern peasants were blameless—nearly perfect indeed, like those of the Irish, and in their own houses beyond criticism; those of the ladies conventional where not rudely condescending. If Mistress Conal was an

exception to the rest of the clan, even she would be more civil to a stranger than to her chief whom she loved—until the stranger gave her offence. And if then she passed to imprecation, she would not curse like an ordinary woman, but like a poetess, gaining rather than losing dignity. She would rise to the evil occasion, no hag, but a largely-offended sibyl, whom nothing thereafter should ever appease. To forgive was a virtue unknown to Mistress Conal. Its more than ordinary difficulty in forgiving is indeed a special fault of the Celtic character. This must not however be confounded with a desire for revenge. The latter is by no means a specially Celtic characteristic. Resentment and vengeance are far from inseparable. The heart that surpasses in courtesy, except indeed that courtesy be rooted in love divine, must, when treated with discourtesy, experience the worse revulsion, feel the bitterer indignation. But many a Celt would forgive, and forgive thoroughly and heartily, with

his enemy in his power, who, so long as he remained beyond his reach, could not even imagine circumstances in which they might be reconciled. To a Celt the summit of wrong is a slight, but apology is correspondingly potent with him. Mistress Conal, however, had not the excuse of a specially courteous nature.

Christina and Mercy, calling upon her one morning, were not ungraciously received, but had the misfortune to remark, trusting to her supposed ignorance of English, upon the dirtiness of her floor, they themselves having imported not a little of the moisture that had turned its surface into a muddy paste. She said nothing, but, to the general grudge she bore the possessors of property once belonging to her clan, she now added a personal one; the offence lay cherished and smouldering. Had the chief offended her, she would have found a score of ways to prove to herself that he meant nothing; but she desired no mitigation of the trespass of strangers.

The people at the New House did not get on very well with any of the clan. In the first place, they were regarded not merely as interlopers, but almost as thieves of the property—though in truth it had passed to them through other hands. In the second place, a rumour had got about that they did not behave with sufficient respect to the chief's family, in the point of whose honour the clan was the more exacting because of their common poverty. Hence the inhabitants of the glen, though they were of course polite, showed but little friendliness.

But the main obstacle to their reception was in themselves: the human was not much developed in them; they understood nothing of their own beings; they had never had any difficulty with themselves:—how could they understand others, especially in circumstances and with histories so different from their own! They had not a notion how poor people feel, still less poor people poorer than before—or how they

regard the rich who have what they have lost. They did not understand any human feeling—not even the silliness they called *love*—a godless, mindless affair, fit only for the doll-histories invented by children: they had a feeling, or a feeling had them, till another feeling came and took its place. When a feeling was there, they felt as if it would never go; when it was gone, they felt as if it had never been; when it returned, they felt as if it had never gone. They seldom came so near anything as to think about it, never put a question to themselves as to how a thing affected them, or concerning the phenomena of its passage through their consciousness! There is a child-eternity of soul that needs to ask nothing, because it understands everything: the ways of the spirit are open to it; but where a soul does not understand, and has to learn, how is it to do so without thinking? They knew nothing of labour, nothing of danger, nothing of hunger, nothing of cold, nothing of sickness, nothing

of loneliness. The realities of life, in their lowest forms as in their highest, were far from them. If they had nearly gone through life instead of having but entered upon it, they would have had some ground for thinking themselves unfairly dealt with; for to be made, and then left to be worthless, unfit even for damnation, might be suspected for hard lines; but there is One who takes a perfect interest in his lowliest creature, and will not so spare it. They were girls notwithstanding who could make themselves agreeable, and passed for clever —Christina because she could give a sharp answer, and sing a drawingroom-song, Mercy because as yet she mostly held her tongue. That there was at the same time in each of them the possibility of being developed into something of inestimable value, is merely to say that they were human.

The days passed, and Christmas drew near. The gentlemen arrived. There was family delight and a bustling reception. It

is amazing—it shows indeed how deep and divine, how much beyond the individual self are the family affections—that such gladness breaks forth in the meeting of persons who, within an hour or so of the joyous welcome, self getting the better of the divine, will begin to feel bored, and will each lay the blame of the disappointment on the other.

Coats were pulled off; mufflers were unwound; pretty hands were helping; strong hands were lifting and carrying; every room was bright with a great fire; tea was refused, and dinner welcomed. After dinner came the unpacking of great boxes; and in the midst of the resultant pleasure, the proposal came to be made—none but Christina knew how—that the inhabitants of the cottage should be invited to dinner on Christmas-eve. It was carried at once, and the next afternoon a formal invitation was sent.

At the cottage it caused conference, no discussion. The lady of the New House had not called with her girls, it was true;

but then neither had the lady of the castle —for that was the clanspeople's name for the whole ridge on which the cottage stood —called on the new-comers! If there was offence, it was mutual! The unceremonious invitation *might* indicate that it was not thought necessary to treat them as persons who knew the ways of society; on the other hand, if it meant that they were ready to throw aside formalities and behave heartily, it would be wrong not to meet them half-way! They resolved therefore to make a counter-proposal; and if the invitation came of neighbourliness, and not of imagined patronage, they would certainly meet it in a friendly spirit! Answer was returned, sealed with no mere crest but with a coat of arms, to the effect that it had been the custom since time forgotten for the chief to welcome his people and friends without distinction on Christmas-eve, and the custom could not be broken; but if the ladies and gentlemen of the New House would favour them with their com-

pany on the occasion, to dine and dance, the chief and his family would gratefully accept any later offer of hospitality Mr. and Mrs. Peregrine Palmer might do them the honour to send.

This reply gave occasion to a good deal of talk at the New House, not entirely of a sort which the friends of the chief would have enjoyed hearing. Frequent were the bursts of laughter from the men at the assumption of the title of *chief* by a man with no more land than he could just manage to live upon. The village they said, and said truly, in which the greater number of *his people* lived, was not his at all—not a foot of the ground on which it stood, not a stone or sod of which it was built—but belonged to a certain Canadian, who was about to turn all his territory around and adjacent into a deer forest! They could not see that, if there had ever been anything genuine in the patriarchal relation, the mere loss of the clan-property could no more cause the chieftainship to

cease, than could the loss of the silver-hilted Andrew Ferrara, handed down from father to son for so many generations.

There are dull people, and just as many clever people, who look upon customs of society as on laws of nature, and judge the worth of others by their knowledge or ignorance of the same. So doing they disable themselves from understanding the essential, which is, like love, the fulfilling of the law. A certain Englishman gave great offence in an Arab tent by striding across the food placed for the company on the ground: would any Celt, Irish or Welsh, have been guilty of such a blunder? But there was not any overt offence on the present occasion. They called it indeed a cool proposal that *they* should put off their Christmas party for that of a ploughman in shabby kilt and hob-nailed shoes; but on their amused indignation supervened the thought that they were in a wild part of the country, where it would be absurd to expect the *savoir vivre* of

the south, and it would be amusing to see the customs of the land. By suggestion and seeming response, the clever Christina, unsuspected even of Mercy, was the motive power to bring about the acceptance of the chief's invitation.

A friendly answer was returned: they would not go to dinner, they said, as it was their custom also to dine at home on Christmas-eve; but they would dine early, and spend the evening with them.

To the laird the presence of the lowland girls promised a great addition to the merry-making. During the last thirty years, all the gentlemen-farmers of the clan, and most of the humbler tacksmen as well, had vanished, and there was a wide intellectual space between all those left and the family of the chief. Often when Ian was away, would Alister, notwithstanding his love to his people and their entire response, have felt lonely but for labour.

There being in the cottage no room equal to the reception of a large company,

and the laird receiving all the members of the clan—"poor," I was going to say, "and rich," but there were no rich—as well as any neighbour or traveller who chose to appear, the father of the present chief had had good regard to the necessities of entertainment in the construction of a new barn: companionship, large feasting, and dancing, had been even more considered than the storing and threshing of his corn.

There are in these days many who will mock; but for my part I am proud of a race whose social relations are the last upon which they will retrench, whose latest yielded pleasure is their hospitality. It is a common feeling that only the *well-to-do* have a right to be hospitable: the ideal flower of hospitality is almost unknown to the rich; it can hardly be grown save in the gardens of the poor; it is one of their beatitudes.

Means in Glenruadh had been shrinking for many years, but the heart of the chief

never shrank. His dwelling dwindled from a castle to a house, from a house to a cottage; but the hospitality did not dwindle. As the money vanished, the show diminished; the place of entertainment from a hall became a kitchen, from a kitchen changed to a barn; but the heart of the chief was the same; the entertainment was but little altered, the hospitality not in the least. When things grow hard, the first saving is generally off others; the Macruadh's was off himself. The land was not his, save as steward of the grace of God! Let it not be supposed he ran in debt: with his mother at the head, or rather the heart of affairs, that could not be. She was not one to regard as hospitality a readiness to share what you have not!

Little did good Doctor Johnson suspect the shifts to which some of the highland families he visited were driven—not to feed, but to house him: and housing in certain conditions of society is the large half of hospitality. Where he did not find

his quarters comfortable, he did not know what crowding had to be devised, what inconveniences endured by the family, that he might have what ease and freedom were possible. Be it in stone hall or thatched cottage, the chief must entertain the stranger as well as befriend his own! This was the fulfilling of his office—none the less that it had descended upon him in evil times. That seldom if ever had a chief been Christian enough or strong enough to fill to the full the relation of father of his people, was nothing against the ideal fact in the existent relation; it was rather for it: now that the chieftainship had come to a man with a large notion of what it required of him, he was the more, not the less ready to aim at the mark of the idea; he was not the more easily to be turned aside from a true attempt to live up to his calling, that many had yielded and were swept along bound slaves in the triumph of Mammon! He looked on his calling as entirely enough to fill full the life that

would fulfil the calling. It was ambition enough for him to be the head of his family, with the highest of earthly relations to realize toward its members. As to the vulgar notion of a man's obligation to himself, he had learned to despise it.

"Rubbish!" Ian would say. "I owe my self nothing. What has my self ever done for me, but lead me wrong? What but it has come between me and my duty—between me and my very Father in heaven—between me and my fellow man! The fools of greed would persuade that a man has no right to waste himself in the low content of making and sharing a humble living; he ought to make money! make a figure in the world, forsooth! be somebody! 'Dwell among the people!' such would say: 'Bah! Let them look after themselves! If they cannot pay their rents, others will; what is it to you if the rents are paid? Send them about their business; turn the land into a deer-forest or a sheep-farm, and clear them out!

They have no rights! A man is bound to the children of his body begotten; the people are nothing to him! A man is not his brother's keeper—except when he has got him in prison!' And so on, in the name of the great devil!"

Whether there was enough in Alister to have met and overcome the spirit of the world, had he been brought up at Oxford or Cambridge, I have not to determine; there was that in him at least which would have come to repent bitterly had he yielded; but brought up as he was, he was not only able to entertain the exalted idea presented to him, but to receive and make it his. With joy he recognized the higher dignity of the shepherd of a few poor, lean, wool-torn human sheep, than of the man who stands for himself, however "spacious in the possession of dirt." He who holds dead land a possession, and living souls none of his, needs wake no curse, for he is in the very pit of creation, a live outrage on the human family.

If Alister Macruadh was not in the highest grade of Christianity, he was on his way thither, for he was doing the work that was given him to do, which is the first condition of all advancement. He had much to learn yet, but he was one who, from every point his feet touched, was on the start to go further.

The day of the holy eve rose clear and bright. Snow was on the hills, and frost in the valley. There had been a time when at this season great games were played between neighbour districts or clans, but here there were no games now, because there were so few men; the more active part fell to the women. Mistress Macruadh was busy all day with her helpers, preparing a dinner of mutton, and beef, and fowls, and red-deer ham; and the men soon gave the barn something of the aspect of the old patriarchal hall for which it was no very poor substitute. A long table, covered with the finest linen, was laid for all comers; and when the guests took their places, they

needed no arranging; all knew their standing, and seated themselves according to knowledge. Two or three small farmers took modestly the upper places once occupied by immediate relatives of the chief, for of the old gentry of the clan there were none. But all were happy, for their chief was with them still. Their reverence was none the less that they were at home with him. They knew his worth, and the roughest among them would mind what the Macruadh said. They knew that he feared nothing; that he was strong as the red stag after which the clan was named; that, with genuine respect for every man, he would at the least insolence knock the fellow down; that he was the best shot, the best sailor, the best ploughman in the clan: I would have said *the best swordsman*, but that, except Ian, there was not another left to it.

Not many of them, however, understood how much he believed that he had to give an account of his people. He was far from

considering such responsibility the clergyman's only. Again and again had he expostulated with some, to save them from the slow gaping hell of drink, and in one case, he had reason to hope, with success.

As they sat at dinner, it seemed to the young fellow who, with his help, had so far been victorious, that the chief scarcely took his eyes off him. One might think there was small danger where the hostess allowed nothing beyond water and milk but small ale; the chief, however, was in dread lest he should taste even that, and caught one moment the longing look he threw at the jug as it passed. He rose and went down the table, speaking to this one and that, but stopped behind the lad, and putting his arm round his shoulders, whispered in his ear. The youth looked up in his face with a solemn smile: had not the chief embraced him before them all! He was only a shepherd-lad, but his chief cared for him!

In the afternoon the extemporized tables were cleared away, candles were fixed in

rough sconces along the walls, not without precaution against fire, and the floor was rubbed clean—for the barn was floored throughout with pine, in parts polished with use. The walls were already covered with the plaids of the men and women, each kept in place by a stone or two on the top of the wall where the rafters rested. In one end was a great heap of yellow oat-straw, which, partly levelled, made a most delightful divan. What with the straw, the plaids, the dresses, the shining of silver ornaments, and the flash of here and there a cairngorm or an amethyst, there was not a little colour in the barn. Some of the guests were poorly but all were decently attired, and the shabbiest behaved as ladies and gentlemen.

The party from the New House walked through the still, star-watched air, with the motionless mountains looking down on them, and a silence around, which they never suspected as a presence. The little girls were of the company, and there was

much merriment. Foolish compliments were not wanting, offered chiefly on the part of Mr. Sercombe, and accepted on that of Christina. The ladies, under their furs and hoods, were in their best, with all the jewels they could wear at once, for they had heard that highlanders have a passion for colour, and that poor people are always best pleased when you go to them in your finery. The souls of these Sasunnachs were full of *things*. They made a fine show as they emerged from the darkness of their wraps into the light of the numerous candles; nor did the approach of the widowed chieftainess to receive them, on the arm of Alister, with Ian on her other side, fail in dignity. The mother was dressed in a rich, matronly black silk; the chief was in the full dress of his clan—the old-fashioned coat of the French court, with its silver buttons and ruffles of fine lace, the kilt of Macruadh tartan in which red predominated, the silver-mounted sporan —of the skin and adorned with the head

of an otter caught with the bare hands of one of his people, and a silver-mounted dirk of length unusual, famed for the beauty of both hilt and blade; Ian was similarly though less showily clad. When she saw the stately dame advancing between her sons, one at least of her visitors felt a doubt whether their condescension would be fully appreciated.

As soon as their reception was over, the piper—to the discomfort of Mr. Sercombe's English ears—began his invitation to the dance, and in a few moments the floor was in a tumult of reels. The girls, unacquainted with their own country's dances, preferred looking on, and after watching reel and strathspey for some time, altogether declined attempting either. But by and by it was the turn of the clanspeople to look on while the lady of the house and her sons danced a quadrille or two with their visitors; after which the chief and his brother pairing with the two elder girls, the ladies were astonished to find them the best

they had ever waltzed with, although they did not dance quite in the London way. Ian's dancing, Christina said, was French; Mercy said all she knew was that the chief took the work and left her only the motion: she felt as in a dream of flying. Before the evening was over, the young men had so far gained on Christina that Mr. Sercombe looked a little commonplace.

CHAPTER XVII.

BETWEEN DANCING AND SUPPER.

The dancing began about six o'clock, and at ten it was time for supper. It was ready, but there was no room for it except the barn; the dancing therefore had to cease for a while, that the table might again be covered. The ladies put on their furs and furry boots and gloves, and went out into the night with the rest.

The laird and Christina started together, but, far from keeping at her side, Alister went and came, now talking to this couple, now to that, and adding to the general pleasure with every word he spoke. Ian and Mercy walked together, and as often as the chief left her side, Christina joined them. Mrs. Palmer stayed with their

hostess; her husband took the younger children by the hand; Mr. Sercombe and Christian sauntered along in the company, talking now to one, now to another of the village girls.

All through the evening Christina and Mercy noted how instantly the word of the chief was followed in the smallest matter, and the fact made its impression on them; for undeveloped natures in the presence of a force, revere it as *power*—understanding by *power*, not the strength to create, to harmonize, to redeem, to discover the true, to suffer with patience; but the faculty of having things one's own vulgar, self-adoring way.

Ian had not proposed to Mercy that they should walk together; but when the issuing crowd had broken into twos and threes, they found themselves side by side. The company took its way along the ridge, and the road eastward. The night was clear, and like a great sapphire frosted with topazes—reminding Ian that, solid as is

the world under our feet, it hangs in the will of God. Mercy and he walked for some time in silence. It was a sudden change from the low barn, the dull candles, and the excitement of the dance, to the awful space, the clear pure far-off lights, and the great stillness. Both felt it, though differently. There was in both of them the quest after peace. It is not the banished demon only that wanders seeking rest, but souls upon souls, and in ever growing numbers. The world and Hades swarm with them. They long after a repose that is not mere cessation of labour: there is a positive, an active rest. Mercy was only beginning to seek it, and that without knowing what it was she needed. Ian sought it in silence with God; she in crepitant intercourse with her kind. Naturally ready to fall into gloom, but healthy enough to avoid it, she would rush at anything to do—not to keep herself from thinking, for she had hardly begun to think, but to escape that heavy sense of non-existence, that weary and restless want

which is the only form life can take to the yet unliving, those who have not yet awakened and arisen from the dead. She was a human chicken that had begun to be aware of herself, but had not yet attacked the shell that enclosed her: because it was transparent, and she could see life about her, she did not know that she was in a shell, or that, if she did not put forth the might of her own life, she was sealing herself up, a life in death, in her antenatal coffin. Many who think themselves free have never yet even seen the shell that imprisons them — know nothing of the liberty wherewith the Lord of our life would set them free. Men fight many a phantom when they ought to be chipping at their shells. "Thou art the dreamer!" they cry to him who would wake them. "See how diligent we are to get on in the world! We labour as if we should never go out of it!" What they call the world is but their shell, which is all the time killing the infant Christ that houses with them.

Ian looked up to the sky, and breathed a deep breath. Mercy looked up in his face, and saw his strangely beautiful smile.

"What are you thinking of, Captain Macruadh?" she said.

"I was thinking," he answered, "that perhaps up *there*"—he waved his arm wide over his head—"might be something like room; but I doubt it, I doubt it!"

Naturally, Mercy was puzzled. The speech sounded quite mad, and yet he could not be mad, he had danced so well! She took comfort that her father was close behind.

"Did you never feel," he resumed, "as if you could not anyhow get room enough?"

"No," answered Mercy, "never."

Ian fell a thinking how to wake in her a feeling of what he meant. He had perceived that one of the first elements in human education is the sense of space—of which sense, probably, the star-dwelt heaven is the first awakener. He believed that without the heavens we could not have

learned the largeness in things below them, could not, for instance, have felt the mystery of the high-ascending gothic roof—for without the greater we cannot interpret the less; and he thought that to have the sense of largeness developed might be to come a little nearer to the truth of things, to the recognition of spiritual relations.

"Did you ever see anything very big?" he asked.

"I suppose London is as big as most things!" she answered, after a moment.

"Did you ever see London?" he asked.

"We generally live there half the year."

"Pardon me; I did not ask if you had ever been to London," said Ian; "I asked if you had ever *seen* London."

"I know the west end pretty well."

"Did it ever strike you as very large?"

"Perhaps not; but the west end is only a part of London."

"Did you ever see London from the top of St. Paul's?"

"No."

"Did you ever see it from the top of Hampstead heath?"

"I have been there several times, but I don't remember seeing London from it. We don't go to London for the sights."

"Then you have not seen London!"

Mercy was annoyed. Ian did not notice that she was, else perhaps he would not have gone on—which would have been a pity, for a little annoyance would do her no harm. At the same time the mood was not favourable to receiving any impression from the region of the things that are not seen. A pause followed.

"It is so delightful," said Ian at length, "to come out of the motion and the heat and the narrowness into the still, cold greatness!"

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself pretty well notwithstanding, Captain Macruadh!"

"What made you think so?" he asked, turning to her with a smile.

"You were so merry—not with me—you think me only a stupid lowland girl; but the other young persons you danced with, laughed very much at things you said to them."

"You are right; I did enjoy myself. As often as one comes near a simple human heart, one's own heart finds a little room."

Ere she knew, Mercy had said—

"And you didn't find any room with me?"

With the sound of her words her face grew hot, as with a furnace-blast, even in the frosty night-air. She would have covered what she had said, but only stammered. Ian turned, and looking at her, said with a gentle gravity—

"You must not be offended with me! I must answer you truly.—You do not give me room: have you not just told me you never longed for any yourself?"

"One ought to be independent!" said Mercy, a little nettled.

"Are you sure of that? What is called independence may really be want of sym-

pathy. That would indicate a kind of loneliness anything but good."

"I wish you would find a less disagreeable companion then!—one that would at least be as good as nobody! I am sorry I don't know how to give you room. I would if I could. Tell me how."

Again Ian turned to her: was it possible there were tears in her voice? But her black eyes were flashing in the starlight!

"Did you ever read Zanoni?" he asked.

"I never heard of it. What is it?"

"A romance of Bulwer's."

"My father won't let us read anything of Bulwer's. Does he write very wicked books?"

"The one I speak of," said Ian, "is not wicked, though it is full of rubbish, and its religion is very false."

Whether Mercy meant to take her revenge on him with consciously bad logic, I am in doubt.

"Captain Macruadh! you astonish me! A Scotchman speak so of religion!"

"I spoke of the religion in that book. I said it was false—which is the same as saying it was not religion."

"Then religion is not all true!"

"All true religion is true," said Ian, inclined to laugh like one that thought to catch an angel, and had clutched a bat! "I was going on to say that, though the religion and philosophy of the book were rubbish, the story was fundamentally a grand conception. It puzzles me to think how a man could start with such an idea, and work it out so well, and yet be so lacking both in insight and logic. It is wonderful how much of one portion of our nature may be developed along with so little of another!"

"What is the story about?" asked Mercy.

"What I may call the canvas of it, speaking as if it were a picture, is the idea that the whole of space is full of life; that, as the smallest drop of water is crowded with monsters of hideous forms and dispositions, so is what we call space full of living creatures,—"

"How horrible!"

"—not all monsters, however. There are among them creatures not altogether differing from us, but differing much from each other,—"

"As much as you and I?"

"—some of them lovely and friendly, others frightful in their beauty and malignity,—"

"What nonsense!"

"Why do you call it nonsense?"

"How could anything beautiful be frightful?"

"I ought not to have said *beautiful.* But the frightfullest face I ever saw ought to have been the finest. When the lady that owned it spoke to me, I shivered."

"But anyhow the whole thing is nonsense!"

"How is it nonsense?"

"Because there are no such creatures."

"How do you know that? Another may have seen them though you and I never did!"

"You are making game of me! You think to make me believe anything you choose!"

"Will you tell me something you do believe?"

"That you may prove immediately that I do not believe it!" she retorted, with more insight than he had expected. "—You are not very entertaining!"

"Would you like me to tell you a story then?"

"Will it be nonsense?"

"No."

"I should like a little nonsense."

"You are an angel of goodness, and as wise as you are lovely!" said Ian.

She turned upon him, and opened wide at him her great black eyes, in which were mingled defiance and question.

"Your reasoning is worthy of your intellect. When you dance," he went on, looking very solemn, "your foot would not bend the neck of a daisy asleep in its rosy crown. The west wind of May haunts you

with its twilight-odours; and when you waltz, so have I seen the waterspout gyrate on the blue floor of the Mediterranean. Your voice is as the harp of Selma; and when you look out of your welkin eyes—no! there I am wrong! Allow me!—ah, I thought so!—dark as Erebus!—But what!"

For Mercy, perceiving at last that he was treating her like the silliest of small girls, lost her patience, and burst into tears.

"You are dreadfully rude!" she sobbed.

Ian was vexed with himself.

"You asked me to talk nonsense to you, Miss Mercy! I attempted to obey you, and have done it stupidly. But at least it was absolute nonsense! Shall I make up for it by telling you a pretty story?"

"Anything to put away that!" answered Mercy, trying to smile.

He began at once, and told her a wonderful tale—told first after this fashion by Rob of the Angels, at a winter-night gathering of the women, as they carded and spun their wool, and reeled their yarn together.

It was one well-known in the country, but Rob had filled it after his fancy with imaginative turns and spiritual hints, unappreciable by the tall child of seventeen walking by Ian's side. There was not among the maidens of the poor village one who would not have understood it better than she. It took her fancy notwithstanding, partly, perhaps, from its unlikeness to any story she had ever heard before. Her childhood had been starved on the husks of new fairy-tales, all invention and no imagination, than which more unnourishing food was never offered to God's children.

The story Ian told her under that skyful of stars, was as Rob of the Angels had dressed it for the clan matrons and maidens, only altered a very little for the ears of the lowland girl.

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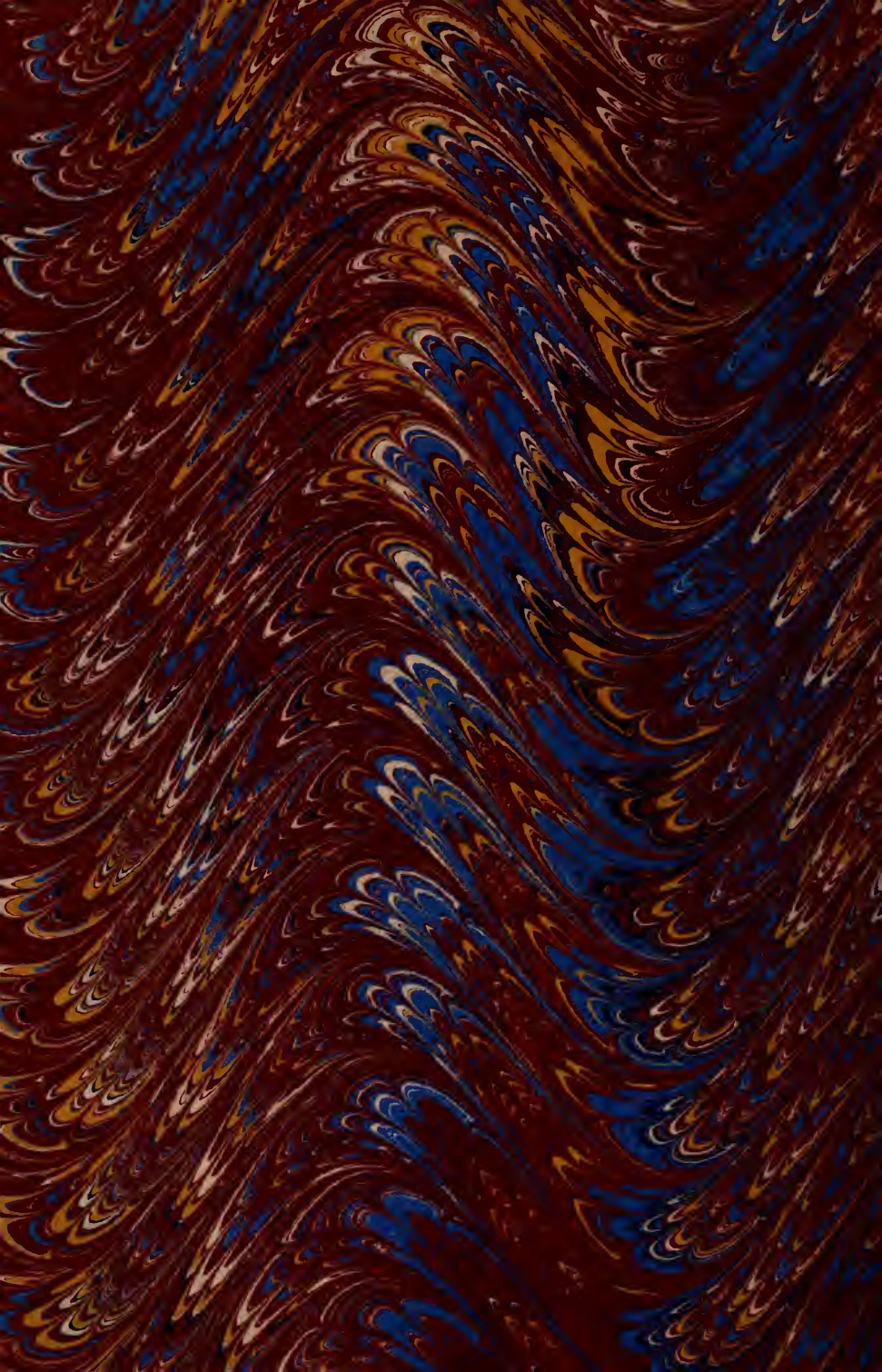

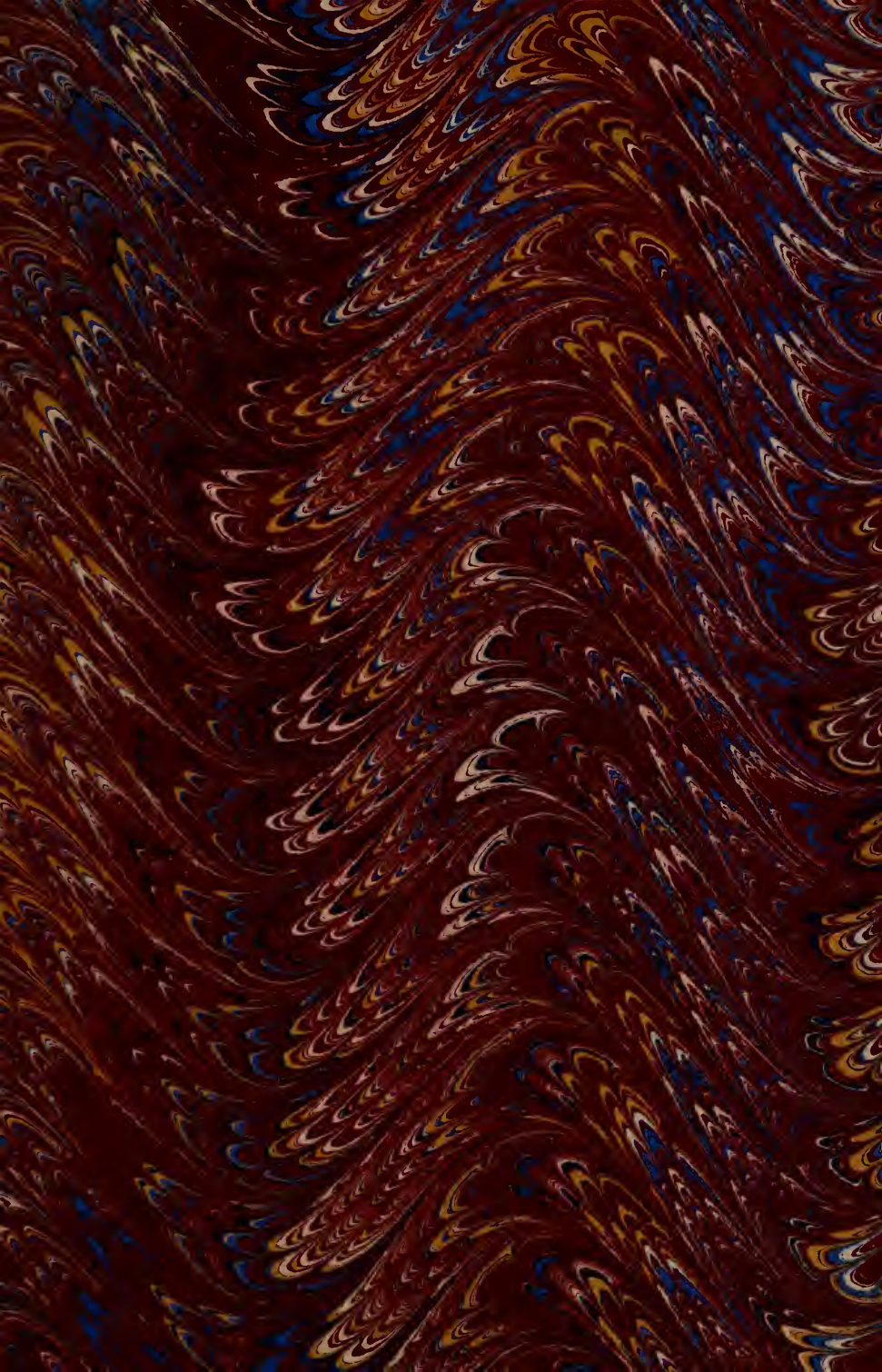

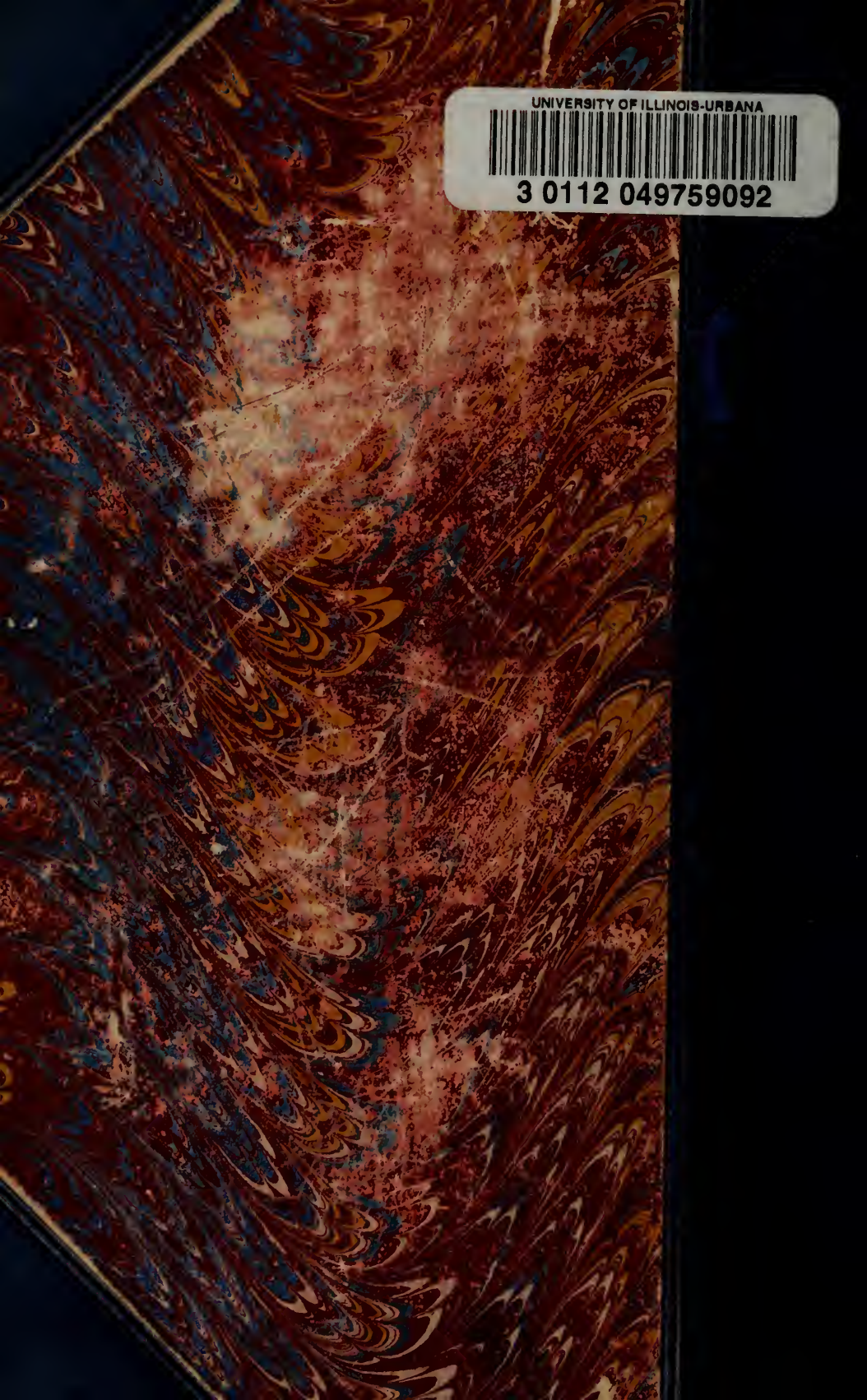
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